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MAY 2008

IN THESE TIMES

Bootlegging
Vonnegut in China

Iraqi refugees in
Motown



DISSENT IN THE RANKS

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE FASTEST-GROWING UNION
GROWS TOO FAST? **DAVID MOBERG REPORTS**

PLUS:

David Sirota on the Race
Chasm and the Clinton Firewall

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Illustration: Lya Edwards

Political Vice Squad

In October 2001, when Congress passed the Patriot Act—and again when it reauthorized it in 2006—the Bush administration assured nervous but compliant members of Congress that these expanded domestic surveillance tools were needed to protect the homeland.

Bush partisans scoffed at critics who worried these new spy powers might be used for nefarious political purposes. After all, that hasn't happened since the '70s—during the last ill-fated war (Vietnam) waged by a criminally inclined Republican president (Nixon)—and the '80s—during the last illegal war (Central America) waged by a morally challenged Republican president (Reagan).

So forgive us if we raise an eyebrow after learning that among the 1 million-plus Suspicious Activity Reports that banks secretly forwarded last year to the Justice Department (as required by the Patriot Act), those allegedly connected to former New York Gov. Eliot Spitzer (D) were the ones that rose to the top.

Even more suspiciously, the *New York Times* reported in March that Justice Department officials, who asked to remain anonymous, admitted, "For years ... the department has rarely, if ever, prosecuted or even identified the clients of a prostitution ring." And yet after the department discovered that Spitzer had hired a prostitute, an unknown number of FBI agents were tasked to keep the governor under surveillance.

The examination of Spitzer's bank records, which led to the discovery that he had hired a prostitute, began last summer when the department was run by Attorney General Alberto Gonzales—who resigned in September under allegations that he had committed perjury and politicized the U.S. Attorney's offices.

Finally, why did the Justice Department go after Spitzer when it had

previously worked to protect whoring politicians? Recall the story of Pamela Martin Associates, a prostitution ring that Deborah Jeane Palfrey operated (office, home or hotel visits) in Washington, D.C., from 1993 to 2005.

Palfrey's attorney described the thousands of men who bought the firm's services as "high-quality clientele" whose assignments "were always in upscale hotels or in upscale parts of D.C., Maryland and Virginia." The 10 years of phone records weighed 46 pounds.

In March 2007, the Gonzales Justice Department sought a judicial gag order to prevent Palfrey from revealing the name of her clients. In July, a federal judge denied the request, and Palfrey released some, but not all, of her records. Among the johns was Sen. David Vitter (R-La.), who unlike Spitzer, is still in office. It is not known what other members of Congress or administration officials were Palfrey clients.

Scott Horton, who covers Justice Department shenanigans for *Harper's*, points out that the department's Public Integrity Section was in charge of the Spitzer investigation. During the Bush administration, Public Integrity has opened 5.6 cases against Democrats for every one case against a Republican. On the magazine's website, Horton also suggests, "The Justice Department needs to submit to some questions about how this probe got launched, who launched it and to what extent political appointees were involved in its direction."

Circumstantial evidence indicates that a corrupt Justice Department has used powers granted under the Patriot Act to investigate and then target Spitzer, who was, until his fall from grace, one of the nation's most powerful and popular Democratic governors.

A congressional inquiry is warranted.

—Joel Bleifuss

IN THESE TIMES

"With liberty and justice for all..."

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mixed reaction

JUST THE FACTS



19.3 Percent home prices declined in 2007 in Las Vegas and Miami.

300 In dollars, the smallest amount an individual will receive as part of the government's economic stimulus package rebate.

150 Number of Bear Stearns shares that rebate could buy at the \$2 per share price JP Morgan initially offered.

.5 Number of "grande" specialty drinks at Starbucks one such \$2 share is worth.

“ Oh Beautiful for smoggy skies, insecticided grain,
For strip-mined mountain's majesty above the asphalt plain.
America, America, man sheds his waste on thee,
And hides the pines with billboard signs, from sea to oily sea.”

—GEORGE CARLIN

LABANARAMA BY TERRY LABAN



QUID PRO QUO

THE QUID:

In 1999, Sen. Phil Gramm used his position as chairman of the Banking Committee to lead the charge in deregulating the banking and financial services industry. Many observers believe the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act—which repealed the Glass-Steagall Act that had separated regulated commercial banks from largely unregulated investment banks—paved the way for the current subprime meltdown.

THE QUO:

The Swiss bank UBS was one of the initial big winners from the act, which enabled it to acquire the brokerage firm Paine Webber. In 2002, Gramm joined UBS as vice president of its new investment banking arm, and later lobbied Congress on its behalf to roll back state rules against predatory brokers. This story hasn't ended well for UBS, which announced on April 1 that it had \$37 billion in losses tied to the



housing market. But Gramm should be OK. Even if he's among the 8,000 UBS employees likely to be axed, he'll still be working as one of Sen. John McCain's main economic advisers.

letters



Our man Nader

Laura S. Washington's "The Nadir of Nader" (April 2008) indicates *In These Times* is going the way of American corporate media, covering elections as horse races instead of sticking to the issues.

Compare Ralph Nader's stances on American problems, such as the Iraq occupation, healthcare and wages, to those of Hillary Clinton, John McCain and Barack Obama. Compare public records and campaign contributors, too. That is how we should select a candidate.

Washington's grudge ought to be against the politically appointed Supreme Court "justices" who halted the recount that would have awarded Florida—and the White House—to Al Gore.

Does Washington think a third party candidate or an independent candidate should not run because it may mean the worst one will beat the second-worst?

If so, then the author is the one reaching a nadir.

*Jim Laregina
Via E-mail*

As with all the Nader attack pieces, Laura S. Washington stumbles into the same tired, lame apologetics for the moribund Democratic Party. Republicans and Democrats might diverge on tactics but we should not fool ourselves into believing some fairytale about the Democratic Party.

So, while Ralph Nader's entry into the presidential race might be disconcerting to some ardent supporters of the

As with all the Nader attack pieces, Laura S. Washington stumbles into the same tired, lame apologetics for the moribund Democratic Party.

vacuous and largely decrepit Democratic Party, I am happy to see the likes of Nader, Cynthia McKinney and others join the debate that our democracy so desperately requires.

*Jonathan McGovern
Via E-mail*

I am an 89-year-old male who would take great pride in voting for Ralph Nader. He brought GM to court, tried his own case and won a cash settlement that he used to start Public Citizen. All this before his 30th birthday.

We have had enough Kennedys, Bushes and Clintons. To them I say, "Get lost."

*August R. Sousa
Fort Myers, Fla.*

EEK!

In "Seattle Battles the Homeless" (April 2008), there is a sentence stating, "The increasing class schism ... has

had a dramatic impact on those trying to eek out a living."

To this I can only utter a cry of "eke."

*Richard Borst
Fairfield, Pa.*

Sick market

Thanks to Terry J. Allen for an astute analysis of the underlying problems with America's healthcare system ("The Malign Magic of Misdirection," March 2008).

I would make only two additions: First, building a healthcare system on a market model makes the horribly fallacious assumption that someone who is sick has any

kind of choice in healthcare decisions. ("Oh, you say I have leukemia and need a bone marrow transplant? Well, I guess I'll see whether anyone else can get me that for less.")

Second, it assumes that every patient in the system is fully trained to assess her medical condition. ("Oh, you say I have leukemia and need a bone marrow transplant? Well, my research tells me that the Chinese have developed a new therapy that is far more effective, and I want you to use that.")

Both of these assumptions mean that the patient is at a serious disadvantage—never mind that it is the patient's life that is in danger. That power dynamic, in an essentially unregulated market, gives us the system we've got now.

*David Thomas
Via E-mail*

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On the Web in April, *ITT* Senior Editor Silja J.A. Talvi examined Gustavus "Gus" Puryear IV, President Bush's nominee for federal judge of the Middle District of Tennessee. As Puryear is the top attorney for the Corrections Corporation of America (CCA), the nation's largest private prison company, Talvi investigated the deaths, beatings, riots and other scandals that have routinely plagued CCA detention centers during Puryear's tenure, as well as the links between the private prison industry and the senators who back Puryear's nomination. Talvi also looked at the surprising momentum of the all-volunteer, grassroots army (led by a former CCA prisoner) that rose up to oppose Puryear's nomination.



contributors

Dear Reader,

In late March, a colleague and I went to Cambridge, Mass., for the Women, Action & the Media conference, a gathering of feminist activists. After veteran journalist Helen Thomas' keynote speech, a woman stood up and asked why the progressive media is not covering the labor movement, particularly the debate within SEIU. I went up afterward and told her about the cover story for the issue you are holding in your hand.

Incidentally, if you are one of the thousands of readers who supports this magazine, you'll soon receive a letter in your mailbox from Senior Editor David Moberg, who wrote this month's cover story.

And speaking of women in media, we congratulate Kari Lydersen, a longtime contributor to *In These Times* and the *Washington Post*. Kari wrote "Dirty Smoke Signals" on page 26, and was recently honored with an Algren Committee Award, given to those who, like writer Nelson Algren, "unite conscience and creative accomplishment."

In solidarity.



Sanhita SinhaRoy
Managing Editor

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LAWRENCE JOSEPH'S most recent books of poems are *Into It* and *Codes, Precepts, Biases and Taboos: Poems 1973-1993*, both published in 2005 by Farrar, Straus and Giroux. He teaches labor and employment law at St. John's University School of Law, where he is Tinnelly Professor of Law.

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The Coalition for Safe and Clean Ports says the trucking industry is exploiting immigrant drivers for the benefit of corporations.

BETH TRIMARCO/CCSP

Big Trucking Deal

A diverse coalition wins a battle to regulate air pollution at California ports

BY KATE SHEPPARD

SANDWICHED BETWEEN THREE FREEWAYS and the fourth-largest container port in the country lies the neighborhood of West Oakland, Calif. Its residents often choke down the exhaust of the 1,500 diesel trucks that pass through the community on the way to and from the Port of Oakland. On any given day, trucks are parked throughout this working-class, African-American neighborhood, sometimes idling for hours as drivers await their next load.

Margaret Gordon, 61, knows these trucks well—and the toll they’ve taken on her neighborhood. She has asthma. Her son has asthma. So do her grandchildren and, according to the Alameda County Public Health Department, at least one in

five kids in the community.

Asthma is not all that afflicts the neighborhood. According to a March report by the California Air Resources Board, there are 1,200 excess cancers per 1 million people in West Oakland. And the average lifespan of residents is six years less than that of their more upscale neighbors in Oakland Hills, only 10 miles away.

“Every year for the last 15 years I have lived in West Oakland, I know somebody [who] has died of some form of cancer,” says Gordon, a founding member of the Environmental Indicators Project, a non-profit organization that studies the local effect of diesel pollution, and a member of the Oakland Port Commission.

For years, dirty air has pitted residents

against truck drivers, many of whom are immigrants working long hours for low wages. A similar story plays out at the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach.

But over the past year, groups as diverse as the Teamsters, the National Resources Defense Council and the American Lung Association have joined community members and truck drivers to form the Coalition for Clean and Safe Ports to take on the broader culprit: an unsustainable trucking system.

In 1980, President Jimmy Carter signed the Motor Carrier Act, which deregulated the industry, turning truckers into independent contractors. Most drivers now own their trucks and are contracted by trucking companies that, in turn, contract with businesses that ship through a port. Drivers are responsible for maintenance, route planning and parking—an expensive system for people whose average annual salary is \$30,000.

Many can afford only older, polluting diesel rigs, and must park wherever they find free space. The trucking companies and the industries for which they transport goods, meanwhile, absorb almost none of these costs.

“This trucking system is totally broken,” says Doug Bloch, an organizer with Change to Win and Oakland director of the Coalition for Clean and Safe Ports. “And it’s exploiting the community and it’s exploiting the immigrant truck drivers, all for the benefit of Wal-Mart and Target and these huge companies that are moving goods through our port.”

In 2000, California set a goal of cutting overall diesel pollution in the state by 85 percent by 2020. And in December 2007, the state followed with a regulation limiting diesel emissions from port trucks. With port traffic expected to double by 2020, these state decisions marked two big victories for community and environmental groups.

In September, the port will begin phasing in new standards that require drivers to purchase clean-burning diesel or natural gas trucks, or to retrofit

older trucks. By the end of 2009, all trucks will be required to meet these standards, but under the current system, few truckers can afford to do so.

"I'm in agreement that we should clean up the environment," says trucker José Manuel Lino Rivas, who lives in Oakland. "But we also need the authorities to help us obtain a truck, because with the salaries we're paid, we can't."

A new truck costs upward of \$125,000. The ports are applying for state grants to help cover some of the costs of transitioning to the new rules. But under the most optimistic projections, grants would provide only \$20,000 to \$50,000 per truck, and maintaining new truck models can cost significantly more.

Rivas was one of 1,250 Oakland drivers to sign a petition last fall calling for a new system that makes them employees of the trucking companies, grants them the right to organize and forces trucking companies to purchase and maintain the trucks.

In addition, the Coalition for Clean and Safe Ports has proposed requir-

ing businesses at the port to pay a fee and to provide information about truck noise, emissions and labor standards in order to do business there. The coalition is also asking for a local-hire policy, which would reserve half of new jobs at the port for people who live in the areas with the highest poverty and asthma hospitalization rates.

Business interests, though, are fighting this model and attempting to divide the coalition, attacking environmentalists in the press for taking up labor concerns, claiming that this shows a lack of commitment to clean air. The American Trucking Association, an industry group, has threatened to sue if the ports adopt a comprehensive plan such as the one the coalition proposes.

The threats, however, didn't stop the Port of Los Angeles Commission from adopting a plan on March 20 that requires the trucking companies to buy and maintain the new, modernized rigs and to employ truckers. And though the Long Beach port commission caved to industry pressure by approving a plan

that left the independent contractor system in place, because of Long Beach's proximity to Los Angeles, it seems likely that Long Beach could ultimately accept Los Angeles' plan.

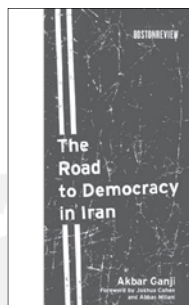
Meanwhile, in late March, the Oakland commission agreed to charge businesses a fee for each container that passes through the port—with proceeds used to retrofit and replace trucks.

Port commissioners also agreed to hire consultants to look at the economic impact of a comprehensive truck management plan, and are expected to make a decision based on those results by late June.

"[Our plan is] good policy, and good policy trumps the grandstanding and misinformation campaigns that industry mounts," says Adrian Martinez, project attorney for the National Resources Defense Council. "Industry and other groups have been trying to separate us, but we've held strong." ■

KATE SHEPPARD is a writing fellow at The American Prospect. She has also written for Bitch, Grist and The Guardian.

The MIT Press



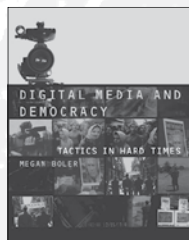
The Road to Democracy in Iran

Akbar Ganji

foreword by Joshua Cohen and Abbas Milani

"Ganji goes beyond religion, ethnicity, or nationality in recognizing universality of concepts such as democracy and human rights... He brings Iran back to the world, allying himself with democratic elements in his country no matter what their creed."

— Azar Nafisi, author of *Reading Lolita in Tehran*
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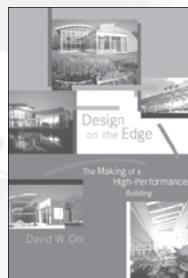
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INDEPENDENCE
THROUGH MOBILITY

According to the Chicago-based Range of Motion Project (ROMP), a nonprofit group that provides prosthetic limbs and orthotic braces to those in need, 80 percent of the world's amputees live in countries, such as Guatemala and Ecuador, where only two-thirds of the population has access to suitable healthcare.

David Krupa, executive director for ROMP, says the group's services are most needed where infrastructure is poor and living conditions are dangerous—especially where a high number of traffic accidents and many infections lead to the need for amputations.

"There are so many amputees because of poverty," Krupa says.

Many of these countries have a severe shortage of professionals who can provide prosthetic rehabilitation.

Because most patients can't pay, Krupa says, "It is very economically difficult to make a living as a professional in this field."

Since ROMP began in 2005, the organization has provided services to more than 300 people in Ecuador, Guatemala and Pakistan.

"There are patients who have waited years for their first prosthesis," Krupa says. "Knowing that they've exhausted all other options and found their way to ROMP, and then knowing that ROMP can solve their problem, is extremely gratifying."

—James H. Ewert Jr.

Louisville Schools
Class-ify Brown

LAST JUNE, THE eulogizing came quickly after the Supreme Court ruled 5-4 to strike down the race-based integration plans at two public school districts. "Bye-bye, *Brown*," was University of Louisville education professor Skip Kifer's succinct response in the *Lexington* (Ky.) *Herald-Leader*.

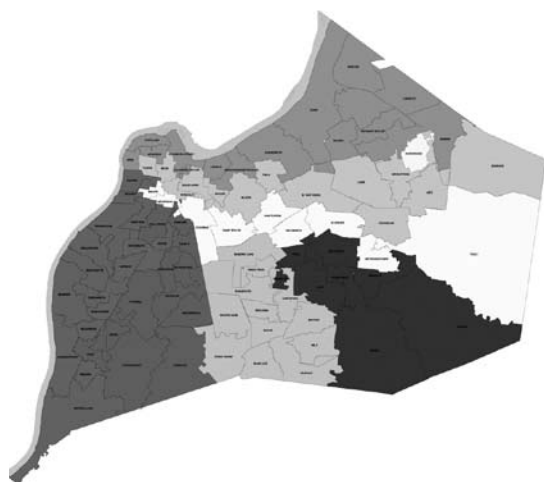
But in Jefferson County, Ky.—one of the school districts whose policies the court declared unconstitutional—school officials have come up with an integration strategy that uses household income, adult education levels and race to determine a school's student body composition. If the Board of Education adopts the plan when it votes in early May, Jefferson County will join the vanguard of school districts that looks at integration along socioeconomic lines as the best way to diversify their schools.

National scrutiny of school integration in Jefferson County is nothing new. The county first made headlines in 1974, when a U.S. district court judge ruled that the county's schools had not been desegregated. A 1975 *Time* cover-story, "Busing Battle," reporting on the resulting court-ordered busing, described black students passing through rows of armed state troopers into their new schools.

Jefferson County achieved integration with a policy requiring that no less than 15 percent and no more than 50 percent of the student body be black. That was the plan the Supreme Court declared unconstitutional last summer in *Meredith v. Jefferson County Board of Education*.

Jefferson County's new plan uses Census data to divide the county into two geographic areas. "Area A" is below the district average in median household income and educational achievement, and above the district average in its percentage of minority students. "Area B" is the opposite.

Schools are then grouped into clusters and students are assigned to schools within those clusters, based primarily on parents' choice. Schools would now have to include no less than 15 percent and no more than 50 percent of students from



This contiguous map shows how socioeconomic factors could determine elementary school integration in Jefferson County, Ky.

geographic Area A.

Only the district's elementary schools will be affected by the plan. Depending on how the clusters are drawn, as few as 1,700 elementary students would have to shift schools. (Enrollment at middle schools and high schools currently meets the new standards.)

"There's a reason to want to [integrate schools along socioeconomic lines], even if it didn't produce racial diversity," says Richard Kahlenberg, a senior fellow at The Century Foundation, a nonprofit public policy institute. "It's that low-income kids do better in a middle-class environment." He points to the 1966 Coleman Report on educational integration, which showed that the socioeconomic makeup of schools is second only to family influence in its effect on student achievement. It's a finding that has been repeatedly upheld.

Kahlenberg says that in schools integrated along socioeconomic lines, students tend to be more academically engaged and are less likely to create discipline problems; parents tend to be more involved; and the schools attract better teachers and administrators.

Kahlenberg says that if the purpose of school assignment is to increase academic learning, "then the primary issue is class. If the issue is how do we create tolerant adults, then I think we want to continue to focus, in part, on race."

The model in Jefferson County attempts to do both.

—Andrew Green

Unlocking Bush's Chastity Belt

FOR ALL ITS fumbling, the Bush administration has one achievement of note: it has persuaded the American public that premarital sex is a risky behavior for teens, akin to smoking or gang activity.

Given the intensity of the administration's abstinence-until-marriage campaign, few were surprised when in February 2007, the *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, a professional research journal, published a study reporting that adolescents who had sex were 58 percent more likely than were virgins to commit a delinquent act (up to one year after sex).

But Paige Harden, a doctoral candidate in psychology at the University of Virginia, didn't buy it. She and her colleagues narrowed the original study's data to compare only identical twins who were raised together but started having sex at different ages. That step automatically controlled for variables such as family and school environment.

Their findings, which will appear in the same *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* this spring, were startling: Twins who had sex earlier than their twin siblings were less likely to become delinquent.

Harden's wasn't the only recent study to loosen the administration's chastity belt. In the January *American Journal of Public Health*, a team from Columbia University linked delays in sexual activity until after the teen years to problems in sexual functioning later in life. The researchers noted that the finding "lends credence to research showing that abstinence-only education may actually increase health risks."

The government's own statistics on the trends in teen sexual health support that conclusion.

On March 11, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released figures showing that one in four young women ages 14 to 19 has a sexually transmitted disease (STD). A CDC spokesperson pronounced the situation an "epidemic."

In December 2007, the CDC announced a 3 percent rise in the teen pregnancy

rate—the first increase in 14 years. And in November, it reported data showing that adolescent rates of two of the three STDs tracked nationally—syphilis and Chlamydia—increased from 2000 to 2006 (the latest reporting year). The third STD, gonorrhea, has climbed 6 percent since 2004.

"We've taken a very negative approach to teen sexuality, and it's not working," says Martha Kempner of the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States.

A backlash against abstinence-only programs may be brewing among young people themselves. Last October, 25 young people from the Washington, D.C.-based group Spiritual Youth for Reproductive Freedom visited Capitol Hill to lobby for equal funding for comprehensive sex education.

In New York City, several eighth-grade girls started the Sex Education Advocacy Project to educate parents and leaders. In December, the girls testified before the city council to ask that sex education be made mandatory in New York middle and high schools.

And at Sex Etc. (a teen-written website and magazine published by Answer, a comprehensive sex education organization at Rutgers University), teens wrote a how-to guide for students on changing their schools' approach to sex education.

State governments are following suit. In late February, Iowa became the 17th state to refuse federal abstinence-only money because of accompanying ideological requirements. (Grant recipients, for example, must teach that sex outside of marriage is likely to have "harmful psychological and physical effects," a claim that is scientifically unproven.)

Says Kempner: "We really swung all the way to the right, and we're coming back in the other direction."

—Steve Yoder

Connecticut's Immigration Duel

TWO CONNECTICUT CITIES have taken opposite approaches to dealing with undocumented immigrants. Last summer, New Haven became the

first city in the country to issue municipal IDs regardless of immigration status. (See "Despite Raids, IDs For All," August 2007.) Meanwhile, in February, Danbury deputized some of its police officers to act in concert with agents of the federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

On March 12, the mayors of the two cities met in the capital of Hartford for a ticketed debate in front of an audience of about a hundred, whose opinions on the issue reflected a similarly divergent range.

New Haven Mayor John DeStefano, a



The Manhattan Institute's Tamar Jacoby calls U.S. immigration 'completely broken.'

Democrat, and Danbury Mayor Mark Boughton, a Republican, agreed that the United States benefits from the work of undocumented immigrants.

Boughton, however, said the current influx of immigrants brings a lot of problems with it, while DeStefano said the problems stem not from the immigrants, but from how American society marginalizes them.

New Haven's groundbreaking ID program has signed up more than 5,500 people—both citizens and non-citizens, documented and undocumented immigrants—since last summer in a city of 130,000, according to the mayor's office.

"I feel very empowered," DeStefano said, "and I think my community feels very empowered to make change." The city estimates its undocumented population at between 12,000 and 15,000.

Boughton, on the other hand, defended his decision to have city detectives

work with federal immigration officials to ferret out the undocumented.

"Until the American people understand that we need to have workers, but we also need to have some sense of how enforcement works and we need to be serious about enforcement, then they're never going to accept whatever gets proposed in Congress," he said at the debate.

Danbury's population is 80,000, and the mayor estimates that undocumented residents account for between 5,000 and 15,000.

A third panelist, Tamar Jacoby of the conservative Manhattan Institute, said that the immigration system is "completely broken." She said the approaches of both cities had merit, and emphasized that America must increase legal immigration to get "the busboys and gardeners" that a prosperous economy requires.

DeStefano outlined past waves of immigration. Jacoby marshaled studies to show that undocumented immigrants contribute more to the growth of the economy than they consume in services.

Boughton relied on anecdotal information, like the story of a landscaper who told him he had to sell his business because competitors using undocumented laborers were undercutting his business.

During the question-and-answer session, one audience member suggested it would be worthwhile to know how American trade and foreign policy have negatively affected the hemisphere, forcing more people off their land and pushing them to *el Norte* to find work.

The World Affairs Council and the *Hartford Courant* sponsored the event, which took place at the Mark Twain House, a building decorated with several of the author's aphorisms, including "Travel is fatal to prejudice."

Meanwhile, members of the Community Watchdog Project, a group made up mostly of New Haven suburbanites, were videotaping the presentation. They have condemned New Haven's municipal ID program and have demanded that undocumented residents be deported.

—Melinda Tuhus

A Boon for T. Boone

TBOONE PICKENS, ONCE known as a corporate raider, is now a billionaire hedge fund investor—and one of the funders of the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth campaign that attacked Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.) in 2004. Currently, Pickens is trying to build a reputation as a philanthropist. "I very much want to give and see the results, and not give after I'm gone," he told *The Chronicle of Philanthropy* in 2006.

In 2005, Pickens, who turns 80 on May 22, donated \$165 million to his alma mater, Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, Okla., to build an "athletic village" on campus. The gift is the largest donation ever to a college athletic program.

The complex, in Phase I of construction, sits north of Boone Pickens Stadium—a football complex—and east of the geology department, also named after Pickens, who graduated from the school in 1951 with a degree in geology.

The sprawling athletic complex—esti-

appall-o-meter

5.3 Pistols for Everybody

Eric Thompson of Green Bay, Wis., has achieved something that his colleagues in the gun industry can only dream of. According to the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*, his company, TGSCOM Inc., armed not only the kid who shot 33 people to death at Virginia Tech, but also the kid who killed six at Northern Illinois University.

Thirty-nine confirmed kills in a year for your clientele, Eric. Attaboy!

But selling weapons to homicidal fuckups isn't all beer and Skittles. Thompson avers that after each of those shooting sprees, he felt grief for the victims. In fact, it stiffened his resolve to sell more guns 'n' ammo.

He's joined forces with a national organization called Students for Concealed Carry on Campus, the *Journal-Sentinel* reports. He won't rest until college kids everywhere in our fair land are allowed to pack heat. This month the group will hold an "empty-holster" protest against "university gun-free zones." Thompson is donating holsters to the cause.

4.9 The Solon of Jonesboro

"The homosexual agenda is destroying this nation, OK. It's just a fact. Not everybody's lifestyle is equal. Just like not all religions are equal."

That's Oklahoma State Rep. Sally Kern, bless her heart, caught in a recorded speech that has been posted to great éclat on YouTube.

"So it's the death knell in this country. I honestly think it's the biggest threat, even in our nation. Even more so than terrorists, or Islam, OK."

What do you suppose Sally did for a living before she answered the call of godly statecraft? A certain tic in her speech gives it away.

"I taught school for close to 20 years and we're not teaching facts and knowledge anymore, folks, we're teaching indoctrination, OK. And they're going after our young children, as young as



2 years of age, to try to teach them that the homosexual lifestyle is an acceptable lifestyle."

OK, Sally! OK?

"You know, gays are infiltrating city capitals. Did you know, Eureka Springs [Ark.] ... anybody been there? Have you heard that the city council of Eureka Springs is now controlled by gays? There are some others, Pittsburgh, Pa., Kensing-

ton, Md., Vermont, Oregon, West Palm Beach, Fla. and lots of other places in Florida."

City capitals, Sally? What exactly were you a teacher of?

"If you've got cancer or something in your little toe, do you say I'm just going to forget about it because the rest of you is fine? It spreads, OK. And this stuff is deadly and it's spreading and it will destroy our young people and it will destroy this nation."

—Dave Mulcahey

mated cost, \$316 million—will house indoor and outdoor practice facilities and a baseball stadium—for use only by the university's approximately 400 athletes.

Using Pickens' money, OSU bought hundreds of buildings in the area, in one case invoking eminent domain. That house, owned by two brothers, was bulldozed in November 2007. The university also reportedly used the threat of eminent domain to raze other homes and uproot families, some of whom had lived in the neighborhood for decades.

Under the Supreme Court's 2005 *Kelo v. City of New London* ruling, eminent domain laws allow government agencies to take property from unwilling sellers on behalf of private developers—including universities—if such land is viewed as promoting the public interest.

A longtime Stillwater resident who did not wish to be identified because of possible business reprisals, says he owned property in the area, which he eventually sold to the university. "They [OSU] took advantage of a number of old ladies and old men that lived there," he says. "Many of them didn't want to move. They had to go buy a higher-priced house. And higher insurance, higher taxes, higher maintenance. It created a hardship on a number of older people."

"There have been a lot of mad people," he says, "a lot of jokes [about how] we were going to change the name of the town to Booneville."

OSU now appears to be on the hunt for more property.

On March 13, Gary Clark, vice president for university relations, met with several church leaders of First Christian Church (FCC) to discuss OSU's interest in the church's land, which sits on the south end of the athletic village.

The church purchased the property in the '50s for \$40,000. The Payne County Assessor's Office today values the property at \$600,000. And it is insured for more than \$1 million, says Leola Thiemann, the church's administrative secretary.

In a March 18 newsletter to the 850-member congregation, the church's Trustees Chair Ron Elliott wrote that, "At this time, there does not appear to be any potential for a mutually beneficial agree-

snapshot



LONDON—A demonstrator from the Marine Conservations Society wears diving gear in front of the House of Parliament on April 3. Environmentalists are calling for passage of the United Kingdom Marine Bill, which would create protected marine reserves in British Waters. (Photo by Peter Macdiarmid/Getty Images)

ment between OSU and FCC, and no further discussions are planned."

"For us to relocate, to reestablish this building with the kind of space we have," says the FCC's Rev. Rick Hendricks, "would take several million dollars, and that's not even feasible for the university to consider."

OSU has also met with Saint John Catholic University Parish and Catholic Student Center—another church in the area—to explore buying its property, as well.

A dollar amount has not been discussed, says Rev. Stuart Crevcoure, the pastor at Saint John, who adds that there has been "no real pressure to make a hasty deal, or the university sort of leaning on us to settle up with them."

"They would be able to have a freer hand in developing this area right by the athletic facilities," Crevcoure says, "but they would also need to guarantee that we would be able to continue our campus ministry [and] have the ability to rebuild our parish facilities in an area that is close

enough that is still easily accessible, especially for the student community." He says the 43-year-old church has about 1,200 members, 450 of whom are students.

OSU has not approached either church with the threat of eminent domain.

In 2000, Congress passed the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act, which protects individuals, houses of worship and other religious institutions from discrimination in zoning and land-marking laws, making the use of eminent domain against a religious institution tough, though not impossible.

Says Crevcoure: "It's very difficult to take the land of one organization that benefits the common good within the community and to replace it by saying, 'Well, we need this for something else that's going to be good for the community.'"

FCC's Hendricks puts it this way: "To move against a church like that would be political suicide."

—Sanhita SinhaRoy

BY SUSAN J. DOUGLAS

News You Can Lose



BRACE YOURSELVES. THE real presidential campaign—the kind the news media have forced us to get used to—has begun, with the twin uproars over remarks by Geraldine Ferraro and the Rev. Jeremiah Wright as the inaugural moments. The way the talking heads on CNN and Fox flogged these stories made you want to outlaw 24-hour cable news.

And it makes you cringe in anticipation of what's to come.

Aren't most of us desperate for a different kind of political coverage? Aren't we really sick of the "horse race coverage," the emphasis on the symbolic, superficial and idiotic?

Remember how Dubya got kid-glove treatment during the 2000 debates and campaign coverage while the press ridiculed Al Gore—who is a hundred times smarter and more principled—for allegedly claiming to have invented the Internet? Well, here we go again.

John McCain, who so far has been getting off scot-free, has committed serial gaffes of substance, in which he confuses Sunnis and Shiites and claims that al Qaeda (Sunnis) are going to Iran (predominantly Shiite) to "retool." He should be hooted off the national stage for this. But no.

The news media, and especially the cable channels, have honed their campaign coverage routines in conjunction with the Lee Atwater-Karl Rove dirty tricks mode of politics, in which easy, negative symbols—Willie Horton, anyone?—and slurs against candidates' strengths become instantly newsworthy, easy and cheap to cover, and thus eclipse stories about actual policy debates or events.

But just as I thought it would be a real victory for democracy if beneficent space aliens came down and eradicated CNN and Fox with laser rays, I logged onto YouTube, which has plenty of anti-Wright videos and commentary. Nonetheless, a person identifying him- or herself as Trinity, a 46-year-old "unapologetic black Christian," posted the full video of Wright's sermon, emphasizing what the cable channels failed to show. As of this writing, the video had nearly 475,000 views and elicited more than 10,000 comments.

Viewers expressed outrage that Fox, in particular, took Wright's remarks out of context. Comments included "Fox News should be sued," "Sean Hannity should be fired"

(we can all dream), and "These media whores are DESPICABLE." To his credit, CNN's Anderson Cooper finally decided to watch the whole speech and posted a much more detailed and fair analysis—on his blog.

And that seems to be the point. Many are starting to see the Internet as the best place to get more well-rounded coverage. As this precedent-defying campaign unfolds, it does so in the midst of a huge flux in American journalism, where YouTube and other websites—AlterNet, Daily Kos, Huffington Post—challenge the mainstream media.

Economic fears about the survival of newspapers now dominate national journalists' concerns, according to the latest "State of the News Media" report published by the Project for Excellence in Journalism. Journalists are less concerned

about being mistrusted. In 1999, 30 percent of national journalists felt that loss of credibility was the profession's biggest problem, while 44 percent felt it was overall quality of coverage. By 2007, only 9

percent cited credibility as a problem and 22 percent cited quality of coverage.

They appear to be out of sync with their audience. An August 2007 poll by the Pew Research Center reported that 53 percent of those surveyed felt the stories put out by news organizations were often inaccurate. The same percentage faulted the press for not caring about the people they report on, and 39 percent said they failed to get their facts straight. Those who get their news from the Internet are especially skeptical about cable news.

But despite this continued mistrust, the broadcast news media continues to operate in infuriatingly predictable ways. As coverage of the war in Iraq has declined in favor of the campaign, Americans' awareness of fatalities in Iraq has "plummeted," according to Pew Research. While the new common knowledge is that "the surge" is working, a survey of reporters in Iraq said that conditions there were "the most perilous they have ever encountered." Unemployment in Baghdad is 30 percent and residents still live without electricity for 16 hours a day. Heard about much of this on our nation's airwaves?

As we live through the challenges posed to conventional journalism by the ferment online, will we see broadcast news finally appreciate what their core audience wants?

Don't count on it. ■

Remember how Dubya got kid-glove treatment during the 2000 debates, while the press incessantly ridiculed Al Gore? Well, here we go again.

BY SALIM MUWAKKIL

A Speech Even Condi Could Love



SECRETARY OF STATE Condoleezza Rice recently called race-based slavery a “birth defect” that still troubles our nation. Her words were notable—not just for their metaphorical precision, but that she uttered them at all.

Conservatives usually are mute on slavery’s lengthening legacy, but Rice let loose. “Black Americans were a founding population,” Rice said during a March 27 interview with the *Washington Times*. “Africans and Europeans came here and founded this country together—Europeans by choice and Africans in chains. That’s not a very pretty reality of our founding.”

Because of this initial inequality, “descendants of slaves did not get much of a head start, and I think you continue to see some of the effects of that,” she continued.

“That particular birth defect makes it hard for us to confront it, hard for us to talk about it and hard for us to realize that it has continuing relevance for who we are today.”

The surprisingly effective presidential campaign of Sen. Barack Obama (D-Ill.) has amped up the current relevance of race. In fact, a controversy surrounding Obama’s former pastor, the Rev. Jeremiah Wright Jr., of Chicago’s Trinity United Church of Christ, has placed racial discussion directly on the media frontburner.

The recently retired pastor had delivered a number of fiery sermons, including one in which he suggested the U.S. imperialist past played a possible role in motivating the 9/11 terrorist attacks. He thundered, “God damn America ... for killing innocent people. God damn America for treating our citizens as less than human. God damn America, for as long as she acts like she is God and she is supreme.”

Wright’s recorded histrionics initially inflamed a white public unfamiliar with the kind of performance art that is common to black American religious expression. And, although the pastor was a bit dramatic in his presentation, many other folks have made his point.

In his 2006 book, *Overthrow: America’s Century of Regime Change from Hawaii to Iraq*, former *New York Times* foreign correspondent Stephen Kinzer noted that in the last century, the United States has overthrown more

regimes than all other nations combined. “No nation in modern history has done this so often, in so many places so far from its own shores,” he wrote. This was Wright’s point as well.

Nevertheless, pundits across the political spectrum denounced the pastor’s remarks. And when placed in context, Wright’s aired comments reveal a cut-and-paste job designed to provoke. This deceitful editing by most major media, particularly Fox News, incited a small backlash from a public increasingly sickened by political gutter sniping.

What’s more, the controversy offered Obama an opportunity to broach the subject of race, a topic his advisers reportedly urged him to shun. Luckily, Obama overruled them.

His March 18 speech on race, “A More Perfect Union,”

was a nuanced masterpiece, exquisitely calibrated. Perhaps he should have tackled this subject before he realized the impossibility of running a “post-racial” campaign in a race-scarred nation, but he

Obama’s speech on race was a nuanced masterpiece that initially baffled the pundits unaccustomed to complexity in campaign rhetoric.

did a good job of catch up.

Not only did he soothe the racial rancor churned up by the tendentiously edited Wright clips, he also demarked a more panoramic vision of the United States than any candidate has in recent times. His speech opened the public space for Condi’s entry into the conversation.

Obama also pre-empted his critics’ efforts to exploit cultural differences between white and black Americans. He deftly sketched the races’ differing historical trajectories and beamed our arrival at a seemingly insoluble stalemate.

But, he noted, we have a choice.

“We can accept a politics that breeds division and conflict and cynicism,” he said in his speech. “We can tackle race only as spectacle, as we did in the O.J. trial—or in the wake of tragedy, as we did in the aftermath of Katrina—or as fodder for the nightly news We can do that,” he said. “But if we do, I can tell you that in the next election, we’ll be talking about some other distraction. And then another one. And then another one. And nothing will change.”

Obama’s speech initially baffled pundits unaccustomed to complexity in campaign rhetoric. However, the speech has generated a slow roll of praise, and many commentators now list it as one of this era’s most significant addresses.

At the very least, it has provoked a dialogue about race so serious that it even has Condoleezza Rice talking black. ■

BY CRAIG AARON

Comcast: Worst. Company. Ever.



INSPIRED BY MARCH Madness, the folks at the Consumerist blog recently set up brackets to determine America's worst company.

The tournament was still going on as this column went to press, but I'm not afraid to predict the winner.

It will be Comcast—in a rout.

Sure, you skeptics are thinking, "What about Wal-Mart? Exxon? Halliburton?" I'll

admit that we can't (yet) connect Comcast to child labor, environmental destruction or Dick Cheney (although clearly you've never sat for seven hours on a Saturday waiting for a new DVR). But I'm not alone in my seething rage for the nation's largest cable company.

The Internet is filled with sites—like ComcastMustDie.com, ComCraptic.com and ComcastSucks.org—dedicated to the company. Comcast customer Brian Finkelstein's

video of one of its technicians sleeping on his couch has been watched more than 1 million times on YouTube.

Then there's Mona Shaw. This once mild-mannered retired nurse from northern Virginia (a square-dancing Unitarian, no less) got so fed up with Comcast's lousy customer service that she went down to the local office armed with a claw hammer. Here's the play-by-by from a *Washington Post* profile of Shaw:

Shaw storms in the company's office. BAM! She whacks the keyboard of the customer service rep. BAM! Down goes the monitor. BAM! She totals the telephone. People scatter, scream, cops show up and what does she do? POW! A parting shot to the phone!

Shaw was arrested and earned a \$345 fine, along with the admiration of millions.

Awful customer service is one thing. But what's truly frightening are Comcast's plans to turn the freewheeling, open Internet into something that looks like, well, cable TV.

Comcast is one of the leading opponents of "Net Neutrality"—the fundamental principle that prevents service providers from discriminating against websites or services based on their source, ownership or destination. Along with AT&T, Time Warner and Verizon, Comcast has claimed that Net Neutrality is just "a solution in search of a problem." Well, here's the problem: Last fall, the Associated Press caught Comcast secretly blocking popular—and legal—peer-

to-peer file-sharing. First, Comcast denied it. Then it claimed it was just "reasonable network management."

There's nothing reasonable about it. The Associated Press couldn't even upload a copy of the King James Bible. And the "bandwidth hogs" that Comcast targeted just so happened to be using a service that directly competes with Comcast's video business.

In response to a complaint filed by my colleagues at Free Press, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) launched an official investigation. Comcast kept denying, stonewalling and questioning the agency's authority. As part of its inquiry, the FCC held a hearing at Harvard University on Feb. 25. But Comcast was so afraid of scrutiny that it hired seat-fillers to crowd out the public and applaud on

cue. But activists photographed the pawns sleeping through the testimony, and Comcast's ploy backfired in a big way. Net Neutrality might be complicated, but everyone knows a dirty trick when she sees it.

With a second hearing announced for April 17 at Stanford University, Comcast issued a press release on March 27, touting an agreement with BitTorrent, one of the firms it had been blocking. Comcast claimed the pact as evidence that the blocking could be "worked out through private business discussions without the need for government intervention." But of course the unenforceable deal doesn't apply to any other firms or future innovators.

This fishy-sounding agreement didn't fool FCC Chairman Kevin Martin. "While it may take time to implement its preferred new traffic management technique," he said in a statement, "it is not at all obvious why Comcast couldn't stop its current practice of arbitrarily blocking its broadband customers from using certain applications."

That's FCC-ese for "I'm not buying it."

To be clear, Martin hasn't always been a friend of the public interest. He has tried to gut media ownership limits and has rubber-stamped mega-mergers. He even voted for the ruling that put Net Neutrality in jeopardy in the first place. But let's give the guy a break. After all, he's human, which means he must hate Comcast, too.

Of course, if the FCC and Congress don't act quickly to stop Comcast and restore Net Neutrality, we may have to take matters into our own hands.

Two words: Hammer time. ■

Comcast's awful customer service is one thing. But what's truly galling are its plans to turn the Internet into something that looks like cable TV.

BY LAURA S. WASHINGTON

Who Would Ida B. Wells Vote For?



RACISM OR SEXISM—WHICH is worse? Take your pick. Paula Giddings' new biography, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions: Ida B. Wells and the Campaign Against Lynching*, offers both options.

The always compelling, at times calamitous, life of this underappreciated black heroine is examined in exhaustive detail by Giddings, a professor of Afro

American studies at Smith College.

Wells, an educator, journalist, suffragist and politician, experienced more than her share of political and social mayhem. And that tumultuous career parallels the 2008 presidential nominating contest.

Are African-American women truly "black enough" if they sport a Hillary Clinton button? Are they betraying sisterhood if they jump on the Barack Obama juggernaut?

Truth be told, too many times my sisters have been abandoned by the white-dominated feminist movement and dissed by their black "brothers."

Wells, who was born a Mississippi slave in 1862 and died on the South Side of Chicago at the age of 68, spent a lifetime dealing with her justified anger at the prejudice her heritage dealt her. She was mad—but she got even.

Nothing is more effective than an angry black woman. Since 2003, I have been privileged to hold the Ida B. Wells-Barnett chair at DePaul University. So I had to grin when Giddings' wrote that Wells had a "reputation as a 'difficult' woman." "Wells was certainly that," Giddings writes, "even when taking into account the double standard applied to assertive, independent women."

Many of "us" can relate.

At 21, Wells stood down a white train conductor on a Chesapeake & Ohio train in Tennessee. "Colored" women weren't allowed to ride in the "ladies' car." When the conductor tried to roust Wells from her seat, she bit him, sued the railroad and won. Wells took that stand in 1883, more than 70 years before Rosa Parks boarded that bus in Montgomery, Ala.

Wells spent a lifetime on the receiving end of a double-barreled barrage of racism and sexism. Her journalistic crusade to wipe out the horrors of lynching was stymied

by the black men she sought to defend. Her male colleagues resented her professional success and attacked her for being too strident for her time. And Wells, a fierce proponent of women's suffrage, was occasionally treated like a second-class citizen by her white counterparts.

Since the days when prepubescent black girls were put on the auction block to be sold as handmaidens for white Southern belles, an uneasy alliance between black and white women has existed in America. Even today, many African-American women view the traditional feminist movement as elitist and clueless about the complex socio-cultural landscape of black America.

Those are the same women who no doubt bristled at Gloria Steinem's recent op-ed in the *New York Times*.

The feminist icon made the Clinton case by arguing that "gender is probably the most restricting force in American life." That left many black women thinking, "Where have you been for *us*, sistuh?"

It's black women, after all, who too often find themselves, and their children, near the bottom of nearly every socioeconomic measure. So they have the most to gain—or lose—if Democrats end up with the wrong nominee.

Don't ask us what side we are on. Tell us what you are going to do about bread-and-butter issues, such as the coming recession, our crumbling schools, the exploding housing crisis and the lack of access to healthcare.

Racism or sexism? A recent CBS News poll suggests a bit of both. The survey, released in mid-March, found that American voters are a bit more likely to believe that a woman presidential candidate will have a harder time than a black man. Thirty-nine percent of registered voters said a woman "faces more obstacles on presidential politics today," while 33 percent said a black candidate does. And 42 percent said Clinton has been judged "more harshly" in the campaign because of her gender. Twenty-seven percent said Obama has been judged "more harshly" because of his race.

Yet more voters—42 percent—said that, in general, racism is a "serious problem." Only 10 percent said it was sexism.

Ida B. Wells once said: "Somebody must show that the Afro-American race is more sinned against than sinning, and it seems to have fallen upon me to do so."

If Wells were with us today, she would declare for Obama. ■

When a white train conductor tried to roust Wells from her seat, she bit him, sued the railroad and won—long before Rosa Parks boarded that bus.

The Clinton Firewall

The Race Chasm and the trampling of democracy

BY DAVID SIROTA

GOOGLE THE PHRASE “CLINTON firewall” and you will come up with an ever-lengthening list of scenarios that Sen. Hillary Clinton’s presidential campaign has said will stop Sen. Barack Obama’s candidacy. The New Hampshire primary, said her campaign, would be the firewall to end Obamamania. Then Super Tuesday was supposed to be the firewall. Then Texas. Now Pennsylvania and Indiana.

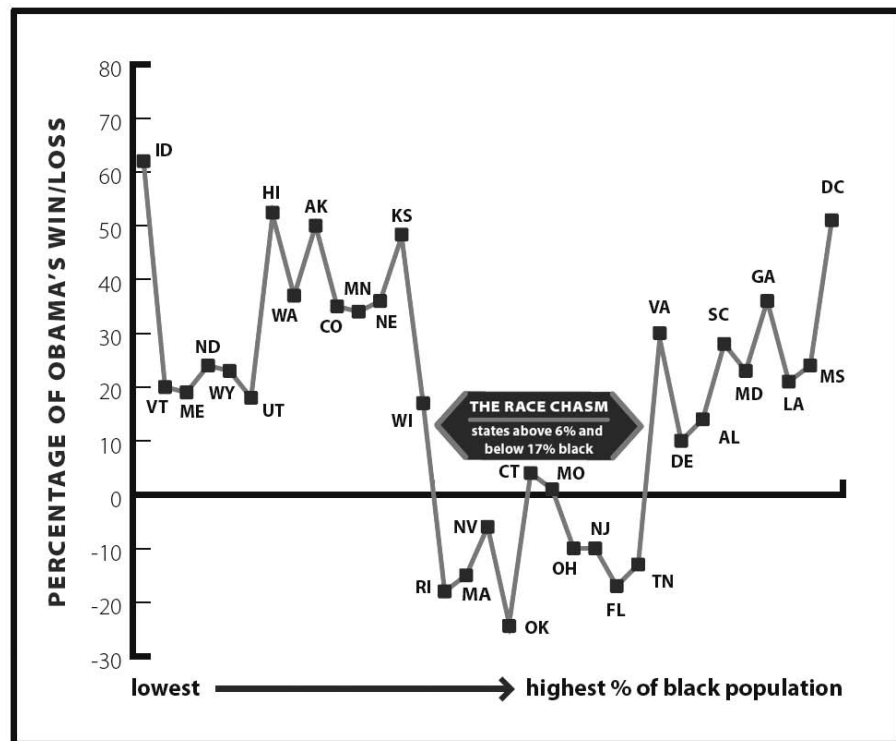
For four months, this game has hypnotized the political world, which hasn’t bothered to ask what this tactic really is. The “just wait until the next state” mantra has diverted attention from the firewall’s true composition. Whether Obama can overcome it will likely decide who is the next Democratic presidential nominee.

The Race Chasm

Since at least the South Carolina primary, the Clinton campaign’s message has been stripped of its poll-tested nuance and has become a crass drumbeat aimed at reminding voters that Obama is black. Whether it is former President Clinton likening Obama’s campaign to Jesse Jackson’s runs, Clinton aides telling the Associated Press that Obama is “the black candidate,” or former vice presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro claiming Obama’s success is a product of his skin color, barely a week goes by without a white Clinton surrogate injecting race into the nominating contest.

That is one of the twin pillars of the Clinton firewall—a well-honed strategy aimed at maximizing “the Race Chasm.”

The Race Chasm may sound like a conventional discussion of the black-white divide, but it is one of the least-discussed geographic, demographic and political dynamics driving the contest between Clinton and Obama. I call it the Race Chasm because of what it looks like on a graph.



SOURCE: U.S. CENSUS, 2008 ELECTION RESULTS

ton and Obama. I call it the Race Chasm because of what it looks like on a graph.

Here’s how it works:

To date, 42 states and the District of Columbia have voted in primaries or caucuses. Factor out the senators’ home states (Arkansas, Illinois and New York), the states where John Edwards was a major factor (Iowa and New Hampshire) and the one state where only Clinton was on the ballot (Michigan) and you are left with 37 elections where the head-to-head Clinton-Obama matchup has been most clear. Subtract the Latino factor—a hugely important but wholly separate influence on the election—by removing the four states whose Hispanic population is more than 25 percent (Arizona, California, New Mexico and Texas), and you are left with 33 elections that best represent how the black-

white split has effected the campaign.

As the Race Chasm graph shows, when you chart Obama’s margin of victory or defeat against the percentage of African Americans living in that state, a striking U-trend emerges. That precipitous dip in Obama’s performance in states with a big-but-not-huge African-American population is the Race Chasm.

On the left of the graph, among states with the smallest black population, Obama has destroyed Clinton. With the candidates differing little on issues, this trend is likely due, in part, to the fact that black-white racial politics are all but nonexistent in nearly totally white states. Thus, Clinton has fewer built-in advantages.

Though some of these states, such as Idaho or Wyoming, have reputations for intolerance, thanks to the occasional mi-

litia headlines, black-white interaction in these places is not a part of people's daily lives—nor their political decisions. Put another way, the dialect of racism—the hints of the Ferraro comment and codes of Bill Clinton's Jesse Jackson reference—is not effective because such language has not historically been a part of the local political discussion. That's especially true in the liberal-skewed Democratic primary.

On the right of the graph, among states with the largest black populations, Obama has also crushed Clinton. Unlike the super-white states, these states—many in the Deep South—have a long and sordid history of day-to-day, black-white racial politics, with President Richard Nixon famously pioneering Republicans' "Southern strategy" to maximize the racist segregationist vote in general elections.

"But in the Democratic primary, the black vote is so huge [in these states], it can overwhelm the white vote," says Thomas Schaller, a political science professor at the University of Maryland, Baltimore. That black vote has gone primarily to Obama, helping him win these states by big margins.

It is in the chasm where Clinton has defeated Obama. These are geographically diverse states from Ohio to Oklahoma to Massachusetts, where racial politics is very much a part of the political culture, but where the black vote is too small to offset a white vote that is racially motivated by the Clinton campaign's tactics. The chasm exists in the cluster of states whose black population is more than 6 percent but below 17 percent, and Clinton has won most of them by beating Obama handily among white working-class voters.

In sum, Obama has been able to eke out victories in only three states with such Race Chasm demographics. And those three states provided him extra advantages: He won Illinois, his home state; Missouri, an Illinois border state; and Connecticut, a state whose Democratic electorate just two years before supported Ned Lamont's insurgent candidacy against Sen. Joe Lieberman, and therefore had uniquely developed infrastructure and political cultures inclined to support an outsider candidacy. Meanwhile, three-quarters of all the states Clinton has won are those

with Race Chasm demographics.

Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell (D), a Clinton supporter, publicly acknowledged this dynamic in February. He suggested to the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* that Obama's ethnicity could prevent him from winning the state, which, at 10.6 percent black, falls squarely in the Race Chasm.

"You've got conservative whites here,

Knowing the Race Chasm can fortify her firewall, Clinton has subsequently intensified her efforts to put race front and center in the campaign, recently attacking the Rev. Jeremiah Wright.

and I think there are some whites who are probably not ready to vote for an African-American candidate," Rendell said.

Obama supporter David K. Levdansky, a state representative from western Pennsylvania, echoed the sentiment. "For all our wanting to believe that race is less of an issue than ever before, the reality of racism still exists," he recently told the *New York Times*. "It's not that [Pennsylvanians] don't think he's qualified, but some people fear that it might be empowering the black community by electing Obama."

Primaries are now looming in a critical group of Race Chasm states—Indiana (8.8 percent black), Kentucky (7.5 percent black), Pennsylvania and West Virginia (only 3 percent black, but a state influenced by the Maryland, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Virginia media markets, which undoubtedly makes race politics more customary than in other mostly white states).

Clinton, knowing the Race Chasm can fortify her firewall, has subsequently intensified her efforts to put race front and center in the campaign, most recently attacking Jeremiah Wright, Obama's former pastor. She is so determined to raise race issues in advance of these contests that she gave an in-person interview to the *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review* specifically to criticize Wright. (The *Tribune-Review* is a conservative newspaper in western Pennsylvania owned by the same Richard Mellon Scaife who funded the anti-Clinton witchhunts of the '90s.)

Despite the oversimplified punditry that comes with presidential campaigns,

demographic groups—white, black or any other—do not vote as monoliths. That said, a phenomenon as stark as the Race Chasm over 33 elections is obviously affecting the campaign—particularly considering the regional and red-blue diversity of each state cluster on the graph.

"When the black population is really small, racial polarization is small enough

that Obama can win, and when the black population is large, any polarization is drowned out by the overwhelming size of the Democratic black vote," says Schaller, author of the recent book *Whistling Past Dixie* that analyzed demographic voting trends. "But in the middle range, polarization is sizeable enough that black voters cannot overcome it, and these are the states where she wins."

The superdelegates

Clinton has two reasons to try to highlight race and maximize the Race Chasm, both related to the second pillar of her firewall—the superdelegates. These are the Congress people, governors and party officials who control roughly 40 percent of the Democratic National Convention votes needed to secure the nomination.

First and most obvious, she wants to win as many of the remaining states as possible to keep her tally of "pledged" delegates—delegates won in primaries and caucuses—as large as possible. In March, Politico.com correctly noted that "Clinton has virtually no chance of winning" the race for pledged delegates. But winning some remaining states and keeping the count close makes it easier for her to argue that the race was almost a tie, and thus theoretically easier to convince superdelegates to throw their support to her, even if she loses the popular vote and thus the pledged delegate count. Clinton, in fact, is already making the argument that she is only narrowly behind. "We're

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DISSENT IN THE RANKS

SEIU IS THE NATION'S FASTEST GROWING UNION—BUT AT WHAT COST?

BY DAVID MOBERG

NO AMERICAN UNION TODAY exercises more influence than the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), a leader in both organizing and political action. And no union leader gets more—or more favorable—press coverage than its president, Andy Stern.

As a result, a political fight now developing within SEIU has broad implications for the labor movement and progressive politics. And the decisions the union makes at its June convention in Puerto Rico are likely to intensify debate over how the labor movement can grow on a grand scale—both in numbers and power.

The in-fighting pits United Healthcare Workers-West (UHW)—a 150,000-member California healthcare local union—and its president, Sal Rosselli, against the international union's leadership. Simmering for several years, the disagreements boiled over in February when Rosselli resigned from the international union executive committee. Then, in late March, Stern took the first step toward implementing a trusteeship that would allow him to oust UHW leaders and take control of the local.

A complex web of grievances caused the dispute. But Rosselli charges that Stern has pursued growth in numbers by centralizing power and resources, and by granting concessions to corporations. SEIU's growth, he claims, has come at the expense of workers' power. Rosselli believes the union needs to rely more on comprehensive pressure campaigns involving workers to neutralize employer opposition to unionization.

"I want a movement of workers governed by workers for workers," who are fully empowered, Rosselli says, "to be in control of their relationship with their employer, to be in control of the political direction of their union."

But SEIU international leaders say Rosselli is unwilling to support national union strategies because he is narrowly focused on the interests of his local. They maintain that the union needs more national coordination of resources and activity to better confront national and, increasingly, global employers.

"Fundamentally," says SEIU spokesman Andy McDonald, "the issue is that there's a disagreement about the fact that there are democratic decision-making procedures in SEIU that [Rosselli] has withdrawn from, and he disagrees with strategies he supported previously [when they benefited him] and that other local leaders support."

THE FIGHT HAS deep roots. In 1988, Rosselli, a former nursing home worker, won an insurgent campaign to lead what was then Local 250 in the Bay Area. He rebuilt the union by emphasizing democratic decision-making and worker militancy.

In 1996, Rosselli supported Stern's candidacy for SEIU president and his plan to strengthen local and national organizing. Rosselli implemented a highly successful organizing drive that used strikes and negotiations with employers to secure the right for workers to organize with little interference. He also cooperated with other locals and the international to win neutrality from hospitals, especially the big Catholic Health Care West chain. The local also organized nursing homes, and was the country's first union to organize homecare workers, which is now the main area of SEIU growth nationally.

In 2005, Local 250 merged with southern California healthcare workers (Local 399) to form UHW. From 2001 to 2006, UHW added 65,000 members—more than any other SEIU local—although recent gains have slowed as UHW builds several long-term hospital organizing campaigns. UHW also supplied organizers and funds to help hospital workers organize around the country.

Organizing nursing homes proved more difficult. In 2003, Local 250 and another local of long-term care workers signed on to an experimental organizing agreement that SEIU International had negotiated with the Nursing Home Alliance, a group of nursing home operators. Alliance companies agreed that if SEIU successfully lobbied for higher state reimbursements to operators, they would be neutral when the union organized selected facilities.

But in 2007, when the agreement came up for renewal, UHW criticized many of its components. The deal had pushed for "template" contracts that barred strikes and limited collective bargaining rights. The pact also gave Alliance operators control over which facilities could be organized, limited economic gains to a fixed share of what the union won politically, prohibited employee criticisms of nursing home operations (except when they were legally obliged) and required the union to back the industry's plan for tort reform—thus going against the union's community and patients' rights allies.

SEIU International and Tyrone Freeman—who heads what is now United Long Term Care Workers, Local 6434—wanted to extend the agreement, for as long as even 20 years. But opposition

from Rosselli and UHW ultimately nixed its renewal. SEIU leaders blamed Rosselli for providing information for a *San Francisco Weekly* article about the Alliance contract, though both he and the reporter deny his involvement.

SEIU went on to establish similar agreements in Washington and New Jersey, and reportedly adopted much of the Alliance model in new neutrality agreements with multi-service companies, such as Sodexo.

thing is growth.”

Indeed, SEIU has grown, and its claim to leadership in the labor movement rests on that success. The union claims it had about 1 million members in 1996 when Stern was elected, and 1.9 million today.

But nearly 200,000 of the 900,000 new members came through a 1998 merger with the old 1199 hospital union based in New York. Another 200,000 counted as new recruits are not actually members,

to win neutrality agreements by becoming the company’s partner.

“When you look at how the international uses these things, you have to unfortunately say, ‘No, this is not the right way to build a union,’” he says. “The international has centralized power to get the boss to defang himself, but the international is also defanging the members. They’re selling workers’ ability to self-determination.”

Now the union’s leaders are proposing

‘THE INTERNATIONAL HAS CENTRALIZED POWER TO GET THE BOSS TO DEFANG HIMSELF,’ SAYS A FORMER MEMBER OF SEIU’S EXECUTIVE BOARD, ‘BUT THEY’RE ALSO DEFANGING THEIR MEMBERS.’

THE SPLIT OVER the Alliance model symbolized and deepened the division that had already been building.

Rosselli supported consolidation on the condition that each local voted individually (as in UHW’s merger), rather than in a pooled vote proposed by Stern, which privileged big locals merging with smaller ones. Rosselli also supported the idea of one statewide healthcare local covering hospital, nursing home and home care workers, as SEIU is organized in several states. The international, on the other hand, favored putting all nursing home and home care workers in Tyrone Freeman’s local.

Although the union’s hearing officers ultimately kept Rosselli’s jurisdiction largely intact, tensions continued to escalate. Rosselli says that he was increasingly excluded from meetings that affected his local’s members, and maintains that international union representatives interfered with negotiations with major employers.

“The red thread that runs through this is that a growing [SEIU] approach is to ask the employer, ‘We want to represent your employees. What is it that you want?’” says UHW policy director Paul Kumar.

Rosselli says the union will be stronger if it involves members in a fight to raise standards at work while winning organizing rights for non-union workers. But for the international union, he says, “growth trumps standards. The most important

but pay legally required agency fees. And 35,000 are retirees. As a result, the union reported to the Labor Department that it had 1.66 million members—including non-voting retirees—at the end of 2007, a year when it added 116,490 members.

Almost 500,000 of them are home care, home childcare and similar quasi-public workers previously treated as independent contractors. While winning representation for them is a big step—and an attractive way to boost membership—it involves a different type of organizing than recruiting members at a workplace under a private, typically hostile employer.

Like many unions, SEIU tries to persuade employers to be neutral when it organizes, and it often mounts ambitious campaigns, at times actively engaging members—as in its successful Justice for Janitors campaign. But the difficulties of organizing have made the union rely more on external campaigns against employers (at times with little worker organizing) and on forging neutrality agreements—such as with the Nursing Home Alliance—that deny workers a fully functioning union.

Out of their growing frustration at realizing large-scale organizing success, SEIU’s leaders have sought new approaches, says Jerome Brown, who recently retired as president of the SEIU 1199-New England local and as an international executive board member. Brown says the international increasingly tries

centralized organizing plans for each major union division. The new 20-year plan will replace local union strategies and shift more dues money to the international. The organizing strategy, which will be presented at the June convention, calls for expanding proven models and developing new models, including expanding the union’s innovative work challenging private equity companies. It also proposes recruiting more member-organizers and temporary organizers from social justice movements, expanding global organizing, and committing to more political work, including passage of the Employee Free Choice Act, which would institutionalize “card check” (allowing unions to be certified when a majority of workers sign union cards).

In a memo to the international, the UHW executive board worried that this centralization will come “at the expense of proven local organizing efforts.” It also questioned whether the international’s track record justifies further concentrating resources and strategy.

Both sides claim the democratic high ground. The international argues that local union leaders will be involved in formulating the national strategy, which they will then implement. Rosselli argues that the members must have a voice and vote in organizing and collective bargaining strategies, not simply out of principle but because such participation strengthens the union. He questions how open the de-

bate will be among national leaders, when Stern appointed two-thirds of the executive board (some of who, including Rosselli, were then elected by members).

"[The international leaders] don't know what they're doing because they have a lack of trust and appreciation of workers," Rosselli says. "They really believe that they're smarter than workers, better than workers. The battle going on is between those who believe the collective power ... can be better used by a few people in Washington, D.C., as opposed to those who believe in bottom-up democracy."

The international union claims that Rosselli has withdrawn from the union's democratic process, but Rosselli says he resigned after he was increasingly excluded from key positions and meetings. In his resignation letter, Rosselli criticized Stern for eliminating the Catholic Healthcare West Unity Council and appointing a union consultant to replace Rosselli as the negotiating lead on the eve of crucial hospital talks. He also accused the international union of negotiating behind his back with the California Nursing Home Alliance and barring UHW members and staff from direct negotiations with the employers, even though they represent three-fourths of Alliance union employees.

Last November, Stern also reorganized SEIU's California state council to oust Rosselli. As council president, Rosselli had

opposed Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's health insurance plan, which Stern supported. Then in January, the international announced new hearings on reorganization of California's healthcare locals that would remove the 65,000 nursing home and home care workers from UHW. UHW countered with a vote supervised by an outside mediator firm in which 40 percent of home care and 70 percent of nursing home workers voted and nearly unanimously chose to stay with UHW.

New controversy erupted in mid-March, when the California Nurses Association (CNA) leafleted against SEIU days before an election slated for nine Catholic Healthcare Partners hospitals in Ohio. Over a three-year period, SEIU had worked for a neutrality agreement that reportedly barred both workers and management from talking about the union at the hospitals.

"I think CNA's actions are despicable," says Rosselli. He describes his "rollercoaster" ride of alternating conflict and cooperation with CNA. "We've seen this happen with our Catholic Healthcare West and our Tenet [Health Corp.] campaigns. It's unprincipled, a huge mistake."

But the international claims that Rosselli met with CNA president Rose Ann DeMoro days before the Ohio vote. UHW administrative vice president John Borsos says there was no meeting, aside from both leaders being at the same AFL-CIO recep-

tion in southern California.

Stern cited the CNA clash among other "allegations" of impropriety in a March 24 letter designed to set the stage for a possible trusteeship of UHW. Borsos describes the charges as "bogus," a "political" move with no legal foundation.

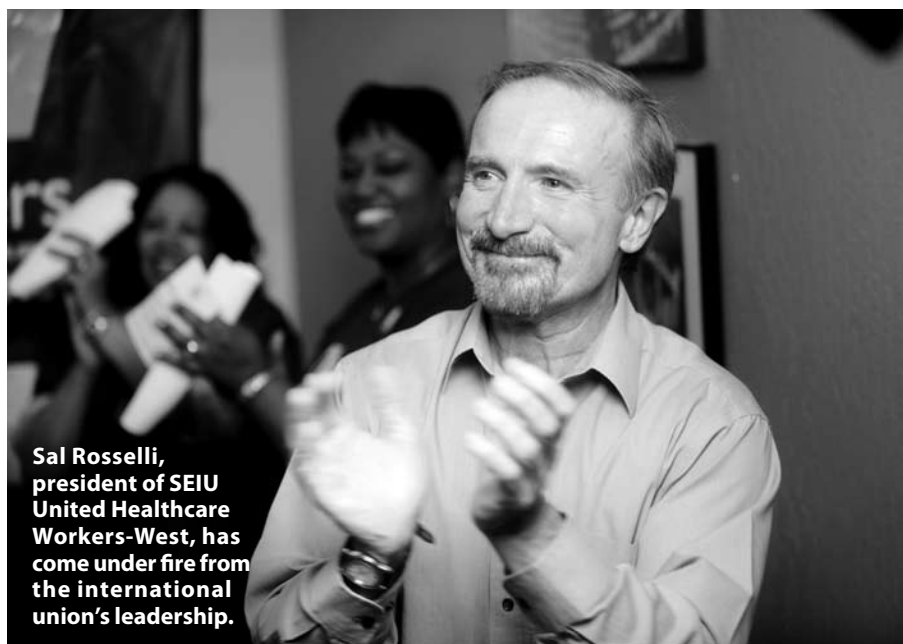
Rosselli says he has no plans to challenge Stern for president at the convention, but UHW will offer resolutions to strengthen union democracy and coordination between locals and the international. Despite signs of dissatisfaction, a fledgling opposition movement is still weak. Few local leaders have criticized the international union, which has organized an extensive campaign against Rosselli, according to an ex-SEIU official who requested anonymity. The UHW may do well simply to hold on to what it has now in the face of the international's full-bore attack.

THE ISSUES IN the debate are hardly limited to SEIU. Many unions struggle to strike a proper balance between local initiative and national strategy. Pervasive tensions exist between how union democracy is practiced and the labor movement's claims that workers should have a stronger voice. The best unions struggle with how to increase both their numbers and their power.

And even if Congress passes the Employee Free Choice Act, unions will still need to fight for employer neutrality. While unions may have to make trade-offs for such agreements, highly restrictive deals with employers are no substitute for organizing and educating workers.

A renewed labor movement needs imaginative leaders, smart strategies, coordinated efforts and progressive values. But the future of SEIU and the labor movement ultimately requires keeping faith with its members.

"We shouldn't start the debate with how do we centralize power," says Jerome Brown. "The central issue ought to be how do we build a 21st century union with members having the democratic right to run it, to strike or not to strike. Members have a right to make decisions. They may be right or wrong, crazy or brilliant. But that isn't the test. It's their decision, their job and their union." ■



Sal Rosselli,
president of SEIU
United Healthcare
Workers-West, has
come under fire from
the international
union's leadership.

IMAGE COURTESY OF SEIU UNITED HEALTHCARE WORKERS-WEST

Putin Is Gone! Long Rule Putin!

With new president, Russians continue to forgo political voice for economic security

BY FRED WEIR

MOSCOW—EVEN BEFORE THE ELECTION night returns came in on March 2, Russian President Vladimir

Putin was introducing his successor to a select crowd at a Red Square rock concert.

At his side and dressed in a dark leather jacket that served only to emphasize his short stature, slight build and corporate lawyer-like demeanor, Dmitri Medvedev appeared slightly dazed. After all, until this moment, he had spent most of his professional life in back rooms, taking orders, not giving them.

The 42-year-old Kremlin retainer had never before been elected to anything, had no political base of his own and became well-known to most Russians only after Putin named him as heir apparent last December.

Medvedev gave a brief, halting speech pledging to continue “the plan that Putin proposed.” A smiling Putin then congratulated Medvedev and assured Russians that this was, indeed, their new president.

Medvedev’s victory has been scorned by critics as a triumph of “managed democracy,” a system that reached its climax under Putin, in which the Kremlin defines the political agenda, stage-manages the process and mobilizes the population to validate the whole exercise with their votes. As one Moscow journalist, Sergei Strokan, remarked, “Putin could have nominated his dog, and it would be duly elected and inaugurated as president.”

Most Russians were aware that their votes weren’t likely to change much. Ac-



cording to a post-election poll by the state-run VTsIOM center, 88 percent of Russians thought Putin will continue playing “an important role” after he steps down in May, while only 10 percent expected Medvedev to fully assume his presidential functions.

On the other hand, there seems little doubt that the majority of Russians went along with—and even embraced—the charade. More than two-thirds turned out to vote, and more than 70 percent of them voted for Medvedev.

Only two serious opponents to Medvedev had been permitted in the race. Communist leader Gennady Zyuganov garnered almost 20 percent, twice his usual vote. With around 10 percent, ultra-na-

tionalist Vladimir Zhirinovsky also exceeded expectations.

In post-Soviet times, Russians have had an “Against All” option on their ballots, and those protest votes were officially tallied. But last year, that right was taken away by the pro-Kremlin Duma—the country’s legislative body—for reasons that seem all-too-obvious.

Catharsis for the inmates

After eight years of Putin, the country has a rubber-stamp parliament dominated by a single party, whose only stated policy is loyalty to the Kremlin. A new leader is selected, as Putin himself was, by a small circle of insiders and then is endorsed in a tightly choreographed public exercise that hardly deserves to be called an election.

Though Russia’s civil society is vibrant and growing, nongovernmental groups with any politically sensitive brief—such as environmental or human rights activists—have been rolled back.

Major media are in the hands of the state or Kremlin-friendly businesses. Even though there is no direct state censorship (as far as one knows), nightly news broadcasts increasingly sound as if there were. A few media outlets seem to buck the trend, but even these live at the whim of powerful, Kremlin-connected owners.

For example, the Moscow radio station, Ekho Moskvi, which has become a last refuge for outspoken liberal voices

from the '90s, is actually owned by Gazprom-Media, a wing of the state-owned natural gas monopoly.

The crusading weekly newspaper *Novaya Gazeta*, where the late journalist Anna Politkovskaya hung her hat before she was assassinated, and which still publishes an occasional piece of genuine investigative journalism, was bought out a couple years ago by billionaire aviation tycoon Alexander Lebedev, who partnered with former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev to close the deal. Some say it's little different from the USSR's policy of allowing a few daring, small-circulation publications such as *Literaturnaya Gazeta* or the journal *Novy Mir*, which served only to illustrate the extent of media control.

"It's true that we have some permitted outlets which are useful for the authorities to prove that there's freedom of the press in Russia," says Viktor Shenderovich, creator of the political satire program *Kukli*, which was driven off the air about a year after Putin came to power in 2000. Shenderovich now has a weekly commentary show on Ekho Moskvi. "We're like the inmates of an insane asylum," he says, "who are allowed to come out and shout a bit while our doctors take notes, then we're led back to our cells."

Russia's counter-narrative

There is a narrative, believed widely in the West, that Russia was building democracy during the '90s, and it was only with the arrival in the Kremlin of former KGB agent Putin that the backsliding began. Most Russians scoff at that, for they see the '90s as a time of economic whirlwind, social misery and the rise of Kremlin oligarchy.

Boris Kagarlitsky, a left-wing philosopher who holds the distinction of having been arrested by Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev and also by the first Russian President Boris Yeltsin—in both cases, ironically, because he actively espoused democratic socialism—argues that the single brief flowering of popular democracy in Russia came toward the end of former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's perestroika era. In that moment, which lasted about two years, Commu-

nist Party rule evaporated and grassroots initiatives filled the void, he says. Multi-candidate elections took place on a level playing field with enthusiastic mass participation.

"It ended pretty quickly after Yeltsin came to power," says Kagarlitsky. "They started dismantling it as soon as the [neoliberal] reforms started kicking in."

In 1993, after the legislature had refused to endorse top-down privatization and was preparing constitutional reforms that would enshrine a strong parliament, Yeltsin disbanded it, drove its deputies away with gunfire and arrested its leaders.

Yeltsin later rewrote Russia's Constitution, vesting the lion's share of power in the Kremlin and creating a new parliament, the state Duma, whose functions were largely decorative.

In 1996, Yeltsin won reelection in a contest against Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov that was a dress rehearsal for all the dirty tricks that later became standard, including full engagement of state resources and personnel to aid the official candidate, media manipulation, voter coercion and outright ballot-box fraud.

Nevertheless, elections in the '90s carried some element of suspense. Small political parties thrived and won representation to legislatures at all levels, local power centers developed and were anchored by directly elected regional governors and politically engaged civil society groups operated with relative freedom.

During that time, investigative journalists broke stories about official corruption, the rising class of oligarchs and their Kremlin connections, and even Russian military atrocities in Chechnya. But all that has been swept away under Putin.

Many Russians believe—rightly or wrongly—that Western establishments celebrated Russia's deeply flawed democracy in the '90s mainly because a geopolitically weak Moscow tended to be servile on foreign policy issues, such as NATO expansion, and accepted loans and advice from the International Monetary Fund. In meetings with Western leaders, Russian officials routinely mouthed the right sort of pro-democracy-and-free markets rhetoric. That debate remains open, but there is little

doubt that the foundations for the thoroughly "managed democracy" of the Putin era were laid by his predecessor.

"All of the changes that Putin has initiated were made possible by Yeltsin," notes Fyodor Lukyanov, editor of *Russia in Global Affairs*, a leading foreign policy journal. "Putin has been proud of the fact that he altered not a single word in the constitution that Yeltsin wrote."

The bargain with authority

Unlike the former USSR, the present Russian state has no desire to control its citizens' private lives, has few claims on culture and positively encourages Western-style consumerism.

In the Putin era, millions of Russians have enjoyed a type of prosperity that has allowed them their first trip abroad, even if only a cheap holiday package to Cyprus, Egypt or Turkey. Huge shopping malls have sprouted in Moscow and other large cities, complete with food courts and multiplex cinemas. The average street newsstand is short on serious political reading matter but boasts a full range of Western consumer titles, from *Vogue* and *Men's Health* to *Better Homes and Gardens*.

Evening news broadcasts may be almost as stultifying as their Soviet-era predecessors, but these days they are followed by Hollywood films and familiar-looking sitcoms, soap operas and reality shows. Increasingly, the entertainment is Russian-made and includes some high quality offerings, such as recent TV productions of Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* and Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*.

All of this is underpinned by Russia's extraordinary economic revival under Putin. Since late 1999, when Yeltsin named Putin as heir apparent, the global price of Russia's main export, oil, has shot from around \$12 per barrel to more than \$100.

On the back of this, the Russian economy has quadrupled in eight years, while average monthly salaries have grown from around \$100 to almost \$600. Two years ago, Russia paid off the bulk of its foreign debt, and is now a net creditor nation.

Unlike the Yeltsin Kremlin, which gave away the whole shop to its private oligar-

chic backers, Putin has banged heads and injected state-led discipline into the business world. He drove away Yeltsin-era oligarchs like Boris Berezovsky, imprisoned oil tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky, and effectively re-nationalized much of Russia's oil and gas resources. Critics say Putin has constructed a state-run bureaucratic oligarchy that concentrates unaccountable economic power in a few hands, even more than was the case in the '90s, but there's no doubt it's been popular.

"Yes, we have authoritarian rule in which the state is synonymous with big business, but people are living much better," says Ilya Ponomarev, a Duma deputy with the Kremlin-created Fair Russia left-wing party. "Russians think with their pockets. Is that so unusual?"

Sheep-like obedience

Putin also exploited the threat of terrorism, which loomed large in the early years of this decade, to reshape Russia's political landscape. A wave of unsolved apartment bombings in late 1999 was used to vault the pro-Putin party into parliamentary dominance and to legitimize a fresh Russian military invasion of the separatist region of Chechnya. That tiny republic has since been pacified under a pro-Moscow local strongman and is, by most independent accounts, a totalitarian hellhole.

Several Chechnya-linked terror attacks in Russia—including a bloody 2003 mass hostage-taking at a downtown Moscow theater and a horrific slaughter of children at a school in Beslan the following year—were employed to justify sweeping crackdowns on civil rights, curbing the electoral system and extending the powers of security services.

"The present [Putin] administration has been a regime of emergency measures," says Sergei Lukashevsky, an expert with the Demos Center, a network of Russian human rights groups. During those years, he says, "fear of terrorism was a major factor forming the political system."

Dramatic expansion of the space for private life, political stability, plus a bit of oil-fuelled prosperity, explains the apparent sheep-like obedience of Russians, say many experts.

"The population has made kind of a bargain with authority, in which we promise to give the stamp of approval to all their political decisions, and the leaders pledge to keep the stability going," says Strokun, a political columnist with the business-oriented *Kommersant* newspaper. "Stability means a piece of bread and personal freedom, but for Russians that's enough for now."

It's typical of the Putin Kremlin that it has stopped trying to respond to its critics, and started investing its petrodollars in a public relations campaign to change the narrative .

As democratic as possible

It's typical of the Putin Kremlin that it has stopped trying to respond to its critics at home and abroad, and started investing petrodollars into changing the narrative.

In 2006, the Kremlin signed a contract with the U.S. public relations firm Ketchum, to advise on ways of improving Russia's image. Big Russian businesses are funding the new Institute for Democracy and Cooperation, which opened offices in the United States early this year. Its chairman, Anatolay Kucherenko, told the Moscow newsmagazine *Profil*, "Our problem is to defend our people against assessments that are really attacks, to find out why poisoned arrows are being aimed at Russia."

Meanwhile, the Communist Party's old propaganda agency, *Novosti*, has been revamped completely and now puts out a daily multilingual newswire, sponsors a multitude of publications and beams a 24-hour English-language TV news channel, Russia Today, around the world by satellite.

A Soviet-era propagandist would be astounded by the lavish funding these organizations enjoy, as well as by the sophisticated, smooth style they employ, which includes airing a wide range of differing views. (Disclosure: I am a frequent commentator on Russia Today.)

At the core of all this public relations activity is the claim that, like those well-stocked shop windows and consumer-

driven newsstands, Russian democracy should be accepted as full-blooded Western-style liberalism with a few local peculiarities. After all, it has multi-candidate elections, and the most popular guy wins.

"We do not call it 'managed democracy.' For us, that term is a propaganda defamation," says Gleb Pavlovsky, head of the Moscow-based Effective Policy Foundation and longtime political adviser to the

Kremlin, who is widely regarded as one of the system's primary architects. "The system created under Putin is as democratic as it can possibly be, given the real state of our society," he says.

A not-so-different view comes from venerable Marxist historian Roy Medvedev (no relation to the new president), who says, "There are not yet enough bricks to build a democratic society, such as a big middle class, independent media and independent businesses. I would rather call Russia an enlightened authoritarian society that has begun to develop."

For activists like Kagarlitsky, who now heads the independent Institute for Study of Globalization and Social Movements in Moscow, that debate is no longer interesting. He says big political change will come to Russia from the top—as it always does—perhaps through a future power struggle between Putin and Medvedev.

In the meantime, he says that there is an upsurge of activity in grassroots movements, where people are organizing to defend their living standards, build trade unions or trying to stop local official abuses.

"You in the media don't notice it because it's not about dramatic and direct confrontation with power," says Kagarlitsky, "but it may be a good thing that it's not politicized, because establishment politicians would try to interfere with it. Let it stay below the radar screen." ■



Navajo members blame emissions from two major coal-burning power plants on their land for causing respiratory problems and cancer.

Dirty Smoke Signals

Navajo Nation weighs costs and benefits of coal mining on its land

BY KARI LYDERSEN

AS A CHILD, BONNIE Wethington remembers hunting for “star-crossed fairy rocks” and catching lizards in thigh-high grass below the majestic Ship Rock and Church Rock on the Navajo Nation, near Four Corners (where Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico and Utah meet).

Now in her 40s, Wethington, a member of the Nation, laments that the grass is sparse and scrubby, and there is hardly a lizard in sight. She says the changes in the land have much to do with the noxious plumes pumping out of two massive coal-burning power plants in the area, and the harvesting of coal from a wide gash in the red and gold earth that runs for miles near her family’s land.

“Now we just have a barren wasteland and acid rain from the power plant,” she says, adding that Navajo consider small reptiles their evolutionary forebears—so

their disappearance is ominous.

“The land is changing,” she says. “The rabbits are dying, the lizards, the cattle are dying off, even the horny toads are dying, and we consider them our grandfathers.” Then she adds: “I used to think Navajos were immune to cancer. Now I’ve had a few relatives die of cancer. I think it’s the power plant.”

The Navajo, like a number of Native American tribes in the Southwest, has found itself in an ironic conundrum.

While this swath of Native land is largely dry, windswept and difficult to farm, it sits in an area rich with mineral and fossil fuel resources—coal, natural gas, oil and uranium. Although Native Americans believe in protecting the earth like a mother, exploiting these resources has provided one of few economic lifelines for a number of impoverished Native communities.

The Southern Ute tribe in southwest

Colorado is flush with income from its natural gas leases. About 1,300 tribal members enjoy monthly payments of about \$1,400 and, after age 60, a generous pension of about \$65,000 a year; plus the use of a spacious fitness center, Montessori school, hospital and other amenities. That’s thanks to the Southern Ute Growth Fund, a private equity investment fund that, since its 1999 inception, has leveraged its gas income into a \$1.45 billion portfolio, including real estate, construction and oil exploration. (The tribe declines to break down how much of this investment is in natural gas.) A large wooden seal adorning the tribe’s headquarters shows a gushing oil well and gas pipelines, along with livestock and mountains—its traditional tribal identifiers.

But historically, it was outsiders who exploited Native Americans lands, leaving environmental and social havoc in their wake.

The Black Mesa Coal Mine on Navajo and Hopi land, east of Phoenix near the New Mexico-Arizona border, is a prime example. The mine fed coal to the Mohave Generating Station located 273 miles away in Laughlin, Nev., via a slurry pipeline—meaning the coal was ground and mixed with water to form a slushy liquid that could be pumped through the pipeline. Each year, the tribes sacrificed about a billion gallons of their sparse water supply to blend and pump the coal to Laughlin, where it was burned to produce electricity for a large swath of the West. Meanwhile, one in three Navajo homes—about 18,000 total—has no electricity, according to the Navajo Tribal Utility Authority.

In 2005, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) closed the Mohave Generating Station—built by multinational Bechtel—because of its high sulfur dioxide emissions. With the station closed, Black Mesa's coal production has been suspended until the Peabody coal company can find another customer.

Also on the reservation, 130 miles north of Black Mesa, the Four Corners and San Juan coal-burning power plants produce electricity that is transported to regional customers on high-tension power lines that pass right over many unwired Navajo homes.

(These are the plants Wethington blames for destroying the local ecology and causing cancer. Numerous studies have also linked emissions from coal-burning power plants to higher rates of asthma and other health problems. The Black Mesa mine has no connection to these plants.)

Desert Rock

Now the Navajo tribe is considering a \$4 billion coal investment that proponents claim would give the tribe ownership over—and significant profit from—its mineral resources.

Navajo President Joe Shirley Jr. supports the proposed Desert Rock generating station, which is spearheaded by the New York firm Sithe Global Power, in partnership with the tribal Dine Power Authority. The station would generate 1,500 megawatts of power, burning local coal harvested by BHP Billiton—one of the world's largest mining companies and

the current supplier of the Four Corners and San Juan plants.

Shirley, a controversial figure who made Desert Rock a central platform of his 2006 re-election campaign, describes the plant as a way to “put food on the table and put shoes on little feet.”

Proponents say the tribe would earn \$50 million a year in coal royalties, tax-

its coal mining operations across its 25-square-mile lease.

Brad Bartlett, an attorney with the Energy Minerals Law Center, charges that BHP Billiton has done a poor job of safely storing waste from the open pit and underground mines it currently operates on Navajo land, and of restoring the tapped-out sites it has mined to

The tribes sacrificed about a billion gallons of their sparse water supply to produce electricity for a large swath of the West. Meanwhile, one in three Navajo homes has no electricity.

es, jobs and related investment. Plus, if it can come up with the capital, the tribe could purchase up to 49 percent interest in the venture. Fliers handed out by proponents promise jobs that could pay \$60,000 a year.

“This is the first energy development we’ve been able to personally be a part of,” says tribal chapter president Lucinda Yellowman Bernalley. “We’re very excited.”

Bernalley and other proponents of the plan say many of their relatives who have left the reservation because of a lack of jobs want to return, and they hope jobs at Desert Rock would make that possible.

But the proposal has divided the tribe, shattering long-standing friendships and alienating neighbors. During a March meeting with journalists, Shirley described Navajo opponents of the plan as “dissidents.”

Meanwhile, these critics say they have suffered ongoing harassment and intimidation from tribal police. George Hardeen, spokesman for Shirley's office, says that claims of harassment—including murdered dogs and cattle—were investigated by independent veterinarians and were found to be groundless.

Lucy Willie, 65, who lives near the proposed Desert Rock site, was part of a December 2006 encampment protesting the Desert Rock plan. Armed tribal police threatened to take her to jail, she says.

If the Desert Rock plant opens, not only would it bring emissions, but BHP Billiton could also significantly expand

supply the Four Corners and San Juan generating stations with coal.

“None of this land has been restored to its pre-mining usage,” Bartlett says. “The waste has everything in it: mercury, selenium, cadmium, radiological contaminants. The ash is stored in unlined ponds and the dust goes everywhere. Eventually they will probably leave the Navajo Nation with the cost of the cleanup.”

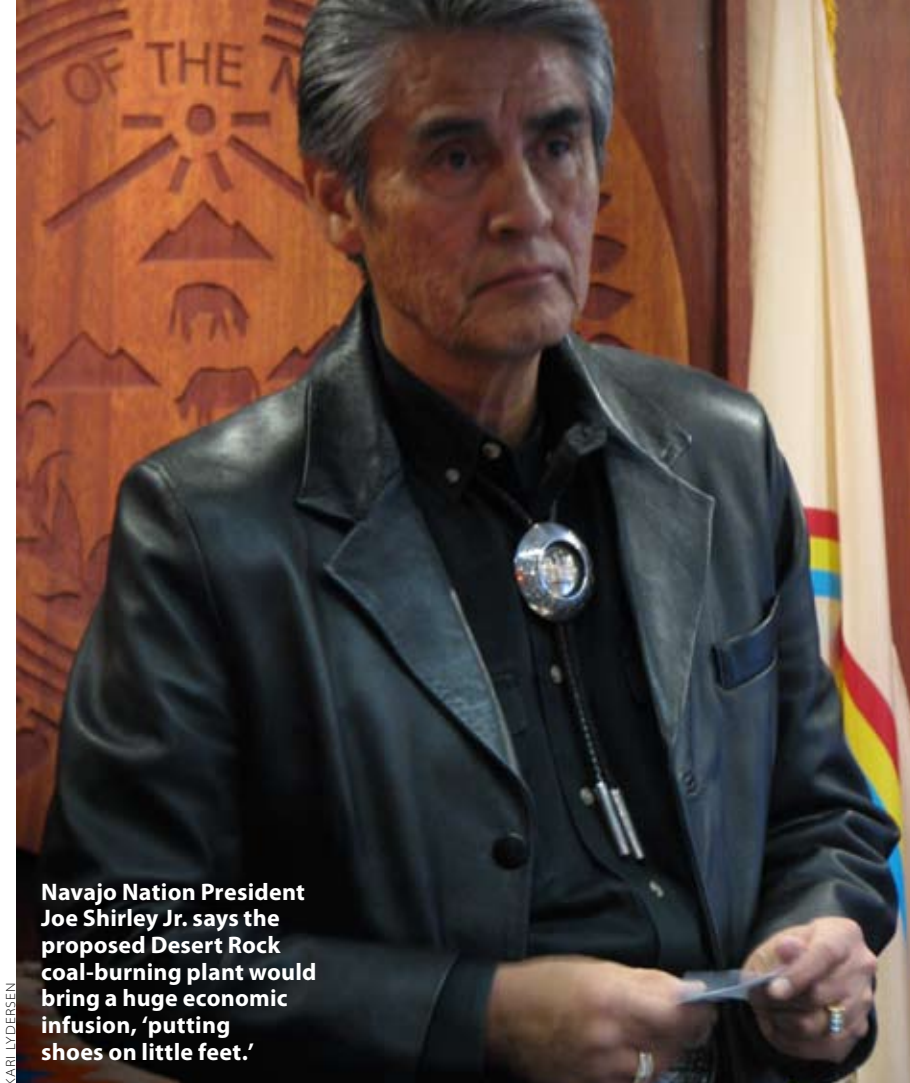
Willie, who has tended sheep on the same land since she was 7 years old, doesn't want to see the ecosystem destroyed this way.

“Five-fingered creatures are supposed to nurture a healthy environment,” she says. “Navajo are not meant to be wanderers. We always come back to a place we call home. Generations down the line, I hope this will still be here for them.”

The Navajo Nation is divided into 110 chapter houses, with each chapter acting essentially as a small local government. The Burnham chapter, which encompasses the proposed Desert Rock site, voted against the idea. Then the boundaries were redrawn so the site lay within the Nenahn-ezad chapter, which voted for it.

However, the tribe still needs an air permit from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). On March 18, the Diné Power Authority and Desert Rock LLC (a subsidiary of Sithe) sued the EPA, claiming it has delayed the permit for four years and is obligated to act.

On March 12, prior to the filing of the suit, Navajo President Shirley, who flew



Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley Jr. says the proposed Desert Rock coal-burning plant would bring a huge economic infusion, 'putting shoes on little feet.'

KARL LYDERSEN

to Washington, D.C., to meet with EPA administrator Stephen Johnson, characterized the federal government's failure to shepherd through the project as a violation of the tribe's sovereignty. Likewise, he claims outside environmentalists are stirring up opposition among tribal members.

"Outsiders are coming in, foreigners giving money to Navajo to say no," Shirley told a group of journalists on the reservation shortly after his meeting with the EPA. "The majority of Navajo support it. What do you want us to do, continue to stay quagmired in poverty? I want to get us standing on our own two feet."

Wind and sun

In 1988, the grassroots group Diné CARE formed to protect local forests and fight a proposed toxic waste incinerator near Dilkon, a town in the southwest part of the reservation. ("Diné" roughly means "people," and it is the

way Navajo refer to themselves. CARE stands for Citizens Against Ruining our Environment.)

Last fall, the group released a study on renewable energy potential on the Navajo Nation. It describes "world-class" solar resources in the Arizona side of Four Corners, and reservation-wide "abundance of moderately to highly valuable solar and wind resources, all largely untapped to date."

"The Navajo Nation is poised to be a leader in renewable energy," says Dailan Jake Long, who grew up near the Desert Rock site and recently graduated from Dartmouth College. "Solar and wind could supply Navajo homes with electricity without the negative consequences of Desert Rock."

Wind energy potential is low in the area immediately surrounding the proposed site, but other parts of the Navajo Nation are considered promising for wind turbines. However, a lack of

access to high capacity power lines prohibits the large-scale sale of energy to the interstate grid.

Proponents say Desert Rock would be a "clean coal" plant—which refers to plants that use technology with an integrated gasification combined cycle and "scrubbers"—to greatly reduce emissions of mercury, nitrous oxide and sulfur dioxide. Desert Rock's environmental impact statement says it would emit 12.7 million tons of carbon dioxide per year.

Though the Bush administration has pushed coal as the fuel source of the future, concerns over pollution and greenhouse gases have meant a nearly de facto moratorium on the building of new plants.

Utilities have canceled or suspended plans for at least 45 coal-fired power plants nationwide. Various state governments have adopted greenhouse gas reduction platforms that would make it difficult, if not impossible, for new plants to be built.

In 2006, California led the way by prohibiting the purchase of energy from plants spewing more than 1,000 pounds of carbon dioxide per megawatt of energy produced.

Long and other Desert Rock opponents argue that now is the time to turn to renewable energy for economic self-sufficiency. In late April, Long, 25, will discuss the Diné CARE study and ideas for renewable energy at the United Nations in New York.

"The nation could invest in lifelong clean jobs and sustainable development projects that don't desecrate the land and relocate people off the reservation," he says. "This is the opportune time. [Nonrenewable] resources can only last so long. We're not just about resistance, we're creating blueprints for our nation, roadmaps for the future." ■

The health risks posed by mining and burning coal pale in comparison to another resource rich in Navajo land: uranium. In a coming issue, In These Times will explore the resurgence of uranium mining and its toxic legacy.

This reporting was made possible by a fellowship from the Institute for Journalism and Natural Resources.



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They Can't Go Home Again

With their country ravaged by Bush's war, Iraqi refugees find the United States indifferent to their plight

BY ADAM DOSTER

ON A RAINY MARCH morning, in a drab office complex off one of Metro Detroit's many expressways, I met Mona and Fadi Rabban.

In broken English, they greeted me graciously, keeping their heads slightly bowed. The diminutive Fadi was dressed in black jeans and a beat-up leather jacket. His beautiful middle-aged wife donned a thin, black cardigan and black slacks, which seemed less suitable for the Midwest winter.

Just six months earlier, the Rabbans had been in Jordan awaiting resettlement to the United States. Their arrival in America capped a journey that began in early 2006, when insurgents forced them to flee their Baghdad home.

Fadi, who was an accountant for 35 years, worked for a company that occasionally did business with American firms—which, in today's Iraqi capital, is a dangerous venture. "When they send you a threat, you have to do [as they say], otherwise they will kill you," he says. "They are serious about it, it's not like a joke."

In a war and occupation that has wrought innumerable, horrific consequences, the Iraqi refugee crisis is among the most disheartening. More than 4 million Iraqis—including the Rabbans—have been externally or internally displaced since the American invasion, and while their stories are ignored in much of the West, their forced migration constitutes a humanitarian and political crisis that has yet to be adequately addressed.

Iraqis flee

In the upcoming book *War Without End: The Iraq Debacle in Context*, Michael Schwartz, a sociologist at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, writes



This Iraqi refugee family from a mixed Sunni and Shiite neighborhood in Baghdad now lives in Damascus.

JAMES GORDON

that Iraq has undergone three waves of displacement since the war began.

First, de-Baathification of the Iraqi government, the disbandment of the Iraqi military and the closing of state-owned industries in 2003 left hundreds of thousands of Iraqis with limited economic prospects. A kidnapping industry boomed shortly thereafter, forcing much of Iraq's moneyed and political elite—many of whom were targeted for ransom—to flee.

The second wave came a year later, when American troops began invading insurgent strongholds in cities such as Fallujah and Samarra. Neighborhoods turned into battlegrounds, further disrupting the lives of residents uninvolved

in the conflict.

Finally, beginning in 2005, and escalating over the next two years, ethnic cleansing in Baghdad and elsewhere displaced what Schwartz calls "a tsunami" of citizens—young and old, rich and poor. The infamous February 2006 bombing of Samarra's Golden Dome, an honored Shiite shrine, accelerated the exodus. In all, the number of refugees is staggering, far outstripping the 900,000 Iraqis, primarily Kurds, who were internally displaced during former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's brutal regime.

While people of all ethnic sects have been affected, Chaldean Catholics—like the Rabbans—have borne a disproportionate burden. Though Chaldeans

make up only 3 percent of Iraq's population, conservative estimates suggest that 25 percent have fled to Syria or relocated to northern Iraq. Sunnis and Shiites have bombed Chaldean-owned businesses and Christian churches in Baghdad, Kirkuk and Mosul. And in one of the war's most high-profile kidnappings, Chaldean archbishop Paulos Faraj Rahho was abducted on Feb. 29 and his body found two weeks later, half buried in a shallow grave in Mosul.

"Communities that are not protected by larger groups that have militias, like Christian communities, have been especially hit hard," says Brian Katulis, a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress, whose work examines U.S. national security policy in the Middle East.

The Karanas are another such family. (Editor's Note: The names of both families have been changed at their request. No other facts have been altered.) Although reticent during our interview, Samir and his wife Ikhlas stressed, "the situation over there was not safe."

In 2005, Ikhlas was pregnant with their first son and Samir's jewelry business was tanking. Like many of their countrymen, they decided to pack up and move to Syria for some needed stability.

But life in neighboring nations is far from comfortable. Countries of asylum, particularly Syria and Jordan, are feeling the strain from influxes of Iraqis—approximately 1.5 million to Syria and 700,000 to Jordan since the war began. International nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) report that hospitals are overcrowded, and the Brookings Institution found that apartment rental prices in the Syrian capital of Damascus have tripled since the war broke out.

To make matters worse, many NGOs have been forced to deliver refugee services in major cities (as opposed to rural settings), which is difficult. Because the population is not concentrated in designated camps, refugees are harder to identify and reach.

Jake Kurtzer, a congressional advocate for Refugees International, notes that without protective status or strong humanitarian community support, refugees face enormous obstacles. "The personal

dynamics of running out of resources," Kurtzer says, "have left Iraqis really in a very dire humanitarian situation."

For the Rabbans and their two sons, now 18 and 24, a \$200 per month apartment in Jordan became a financial burden when no one in the family could find work. The problems didn't stop there.

Many of the 2 million refugees who have relocated within Iraq's borders live in substandard or overcrowded shelters with little access to food rations, healthcare and medicine.

"You're not allowed to take your kids to school, you have no medical insurance," Fadi says, "and they count you as an illegal resident, so if they catch you, they will throw you [back] over the border."

It's not much easier for the 2 million people who have relocated within Iraq's borders. Many Iraqi refugees live in substandard or overcrowded shelters, only 22 percent report regular access to food rations, 14 percent have no access to healthcare, 33 percent cannot access the medications they require and 31 percent report that their property is occupied, according to a January report by the International Organization for Migration. And the crisis is deepening.

Bureaucratic purgatory

Not surprisingly, a growing number of Iraqis—many of whom are running out of savings and weary of conflict—have attempted to resettle outside of the Middle East entirely. For those seeking refuge in the United States, southeast Michigan has become a popular destination.

Jumana Salamey, curator of education at the Arab American National Museum in the Detroit suburb of Dearborn, says that Christians from Syria and Lebanon began immigrating to Detroit at the turn of the 20th century, looking to establish economic security abroad by selling textiles or working in the burgeoning auto industry.

Another wave of Muslim and Christian Arab immigrants arrived after World War II, some hoping to continue their educations and others lured by their well-es-

tablished families. Wars and political tension in Lebanon, the Palestinian territories, and Iraq led a third generation of expatriates to Detroit in the '70s, '80s and '90s.

Today, more than 150,000 Chaldean Americans and 300,000 Arab Americans call Metro Detroit home. For many, they considered this the Arab capital of the

United States, home to Arab-owned businesses, mosques and the Arab American National Museum.

While in Jordan, the Rabbans had dreams of resettling in Detroit, both to join the vibrant Chaldean community and to reunite with their daughter, who had previously married and moved to the Detroit suburb of Farmington Hills. Gaining such a coveted resettlement allocation was a grueling process. Over a span of 18 months, the Rabbans were interviewed seven different times, first by representatives from the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), then by FBI agents.

"The interviews were very detailed and very hard," Fadi says. "They were so serious, they were taking every single bit of information from us." Field agents spared no details, verifying the consistency of their accounts, administering physical exams and running background checks. "You want to make sure all of the information is correct," he says, "but because the situation is so hard in Jordan, you feel that you want to make [the process] shorter."

The Karanas had a similar experience in Syria. Two years passed between the day they submitted their UNHCR application and their resettlement date in the Detroit suburb of Oak Park. They acknowledge they were lucky—only 10 percent of applicants who register for relocation qualify, according to the *Christian Science Monitor*—but that didn't make their time in bureaucratic purgatory move any faster.



Sabri Nissan plays solitaire in the Detroit suburb of Sterling Heights, Mich., where he and his family moved in August upon being granted asylum after spending five years in Turkey as Iraqi refugees.

GEORGE ROBINS/AP/GETTY IMAGES

bad,” says Ita. “When they came in, there were no jobs, and the services [like food stamps and Medicaid] were ... more difficult to get than they were 10 years ago.”

Since arriving in September, Fadi has failed to secure employment, although it’s not for lack of effort. He’d prefer to work in accounting, but his age and his cursory knowledge of English are major liabilities in the tight labor market, and he’s applied for entry-level work in a variety of fields. So far, he’s found no takers.

His eldest son, a former university student in Baghdad, landed a job working in the stock room at a department store. His mother and father were thrilled, but his bosses quickly cut his hours to 15 per week, meaning he nets only around \$400 a month, the family’s sole income source.

The youngest son is adept with computers but has been turned down repeatedly for information technology jobs. As the months pass, his father says the 18-year-old, who has battled depression since leaving Iraq, spends more and more time holed up in his room.

Samir’s English is better than Fadi’s, but he has had just as much difficulty scoring work. Down the road, he would like to sell jewelry like he did in Baghdad, but he says that without a car, which he can’t afford, it’s difficult to connect with people in that industry. For now, he waits patiently with his wife and son at home, hoping something comes up.

Motor City blues

When the families arrived in Michigan, they found a community willing to help them assimilate, a unique regional attribute.

“The community is established already,” says Rafat Ita, my translator and community resources coordinator for the Lutheran Social Services of Michigan (LSSM). “They walk in, they speak the language, and they feel like they are home.”

LSSM, a state-funded nonprofit agency, helps refugees from across the world obtain housing, food, transportation and employment. It also provides refugees with translation services, English as a Second Language classes and some financial assistance.

Ita, who resettled from Iraq in 1994,

says LSSM’s support was critical to his successful immersion into American life. “It was a blessing when I came here and they took care of me, getting me transportation, finding me a job,” he says. “Without [LSSM], it definitely would have been very difficult.”

But what Detroit boasts in Middle Eastern culture, it lacks in economic opportunities. As Michigan sheds more and more manufacturing jobs—300,000 since 1999—its unemployment rate rises. In November 2007, that rate hit 7.4 percent, a full percentage point higher than any other state in the nation. Even worse, the Department of Treasury forecasts that unemployment will jump to 8.3 percent this year and 8.9 percent in 2009.

“It’s hard because the economy is so

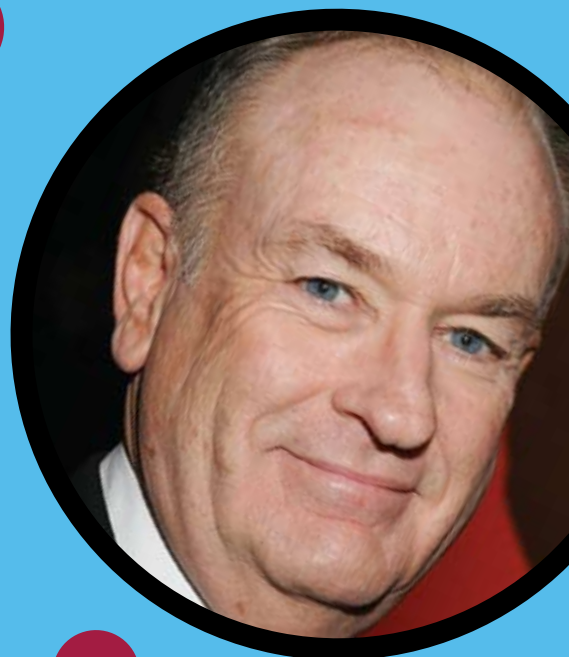
Pitiful response

Despite their woes, both families seem resolutely optimistic and say they have no intention of returning to Iraq. And when friends and family update them about life in Baghdad, it puts Michigan’s shortfalls in perspective.

“Our family is still over there and it’s just such a dangerous life,” Samir says. “The main things we hear about are the services. There’s almost no water, electric [or] transportation.”

Mona says that when they fled, they left their home fully furnished. Insurgents have since moved in. “We can’t go back,” she says, “or we’d be killed.”

Given this context, the Bush administration’s response to the displacement crisis has been pitiful. From 2003 to 2007,



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the White House—which instigated the war and made scores of Iraqis vulnerable by employing them as translators and drivers—refused to acknowledge the existence of a crisis at all, resettling a mere 466 refugees into the United States.

Rising violence and growing attention to the emergency forced President Bush's hand in early 2007. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice created a high-level State Department task force on the refugee issue and promised to resettle 25,000 Iraqis. But over the course of the year, that target dropped to 7,000, and later to 2,000. By year's end, only 1,608 Iraqis had been admitted.

The number of refugees processed each month would have to triple for the administration to meet its new 2008 goal of resettling 12,000 refugees. And on March 11, the State Department's Senior Coordinator of Iraqi Refugee Issues James B. Foley told the House subcommittee on Middle East and South Asia that reaching that number is "not guaranteed."

By contrast, Sweden, a nation of 9 million people, has resettled more than 90,000 Iraqis, in spite of its opposition to the invasion. The Center for American Progress' Katulis and his colleagues have advocated that the United States should take in at least 100,000 refugees annually, based on UNHCR estimates of Iraqi citi-

zens facing extreme vulnerability.

Why does America keep missing its targets? The State Department points to bureaucratic snafus, ranging from the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) stringent security review of each applicant, to jurisdictional confusion between the State Department and DHS, to a lack of interviewers in the field. Kurtzer says the

'There's been a lack of political will from the senior levels of the Bush administration to respond to this crisis in a way that we know the American government is capable of responding.'

fault lies with the White House, where officials refuse to take the problem seriously.

"There's been a lack of political will from the senior levels of the administration to respond to this crisis in a way that we know the government is capable of responding," he says. "When the White House is interested in putting resources and finding solutions to a problem, they are clearly capable of doing it."

Such was the case in 1975, when, under President Gerald Ford, the United States resettled 130,000 South Vietnamese refugees between May and December after the fall of Saigon. Overall, more than 900,000 were eventually admitted to the country.

"To do less," Ford later said, "would have added moral shame to humiliation."

Even the current administration has accepted expatriates when it has been politically viable. In May 2006, the White House agreed to move forward with the resettlement of thousands of Burmese refugees, a region that has garnered the attention of First Lady Laura Bush.

But Iraq is a different story.

Admitting that the embattled nation is in the throes of a humanitarian crisis disrupts the narrative that Iraq is stable and the war is winnable. Allowing people from the Arab world to emigrate freely could also brand the GOP as soft on terrorism, a political liability among the party's conservative base, especially in an election year.

Unless the Congress and the president implement sweeping reforms immediately, the crisis will only worsen; Foley told the House subcommittee that the situation is intensifying and "the most critical problem is increasing impoverishment."

What's more, mass displacement could complicate Iraq's national reconciliation, a process Gen. David Petraeus recently admitted is nowhere near complete. As Iraqis relocate permanently, shifting populations will, in part, determine how certain sects are compensated in a power-sharing deal.

"It's not only a humanitarian issue, it's a deeply political issue, too," says Katulis. "This will necessarily be one component of that [process] that many people have not yet thought of."

Back in Michigan, the refugees continue to put their lives back together. The Karanas are planning to enroll their son in day care soon, which will allow him to interact with kids his own age. The Rabbans have enjoyed spending time with their extended family, including their daughter.

"We want to build our future here, for ourselves and for our kids," says Fadi. "We have nothing to build back home." ■

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Clinton Firewall

Continued from page 19

separated by, you know, a little more than a hundred delegates,” she told *Time*, not bothering to note that 100 delegates is more than the entire delegate count from major states like Missouri or Wisconsin.

Second, in trying to maximize the Race Chasm by focusing on race-tinged issues, Clinton is tacitly making an “electability” argument to superdelegates. (This is not a stupid strategy in courting officials who are all, in one way or another, election-focused political operatives.) Part of that argument hinges on portraying Obama as “unelectable.” And what better way to do that than to stoke as many race-focused controversies as possible? It is a standard primary tactic: Launch a line of attack—in this case, the “Wright controversy”—and then claim the attack will be used by Republicans to defeat an opponent—in this case Obama—should he become the general election candidate.

Ruthless but probably useless

The Clinton firewall strategy is stunning in its ruthlessness. It has been half a century since the major triumphs of the civil rights and party reform movements, yet a major Democratic candidate is attempting to secure a presidential nomination by exploiting racial divides and negotiating backroom superdelegate deals.

But success is not likely.

Even if Clinton wins big in the remaining Race Chasm states, Obama has advantages in Montana, North Carolina, Oregon and South Dakota—smaller states, to be sure, but likely enough pledged delegates to keep a significant lead. Clinton, therefore, would have a difficult time convincing superdelegates to go against the will of the people in their states.

That leaves the “electability” argument with superdelegates—and there the problem for Clinton is that polls show Obama is as “electable” as Clinton, if not more so.

A state-by-state SurveyUSA poll in March found Obama and Clinton defeating Republican nominee Sen. John McCain in a hypothetical general election matchup—and Obama getting four more Electoral College votes than Clinton.

In Colorado, a key swing state, a March Rasmussen Reports poll found Obama tying McCain, but McCain clobbering Clinton by 14 percentage points. A February Rasmussen poll reported a similar phenomenon in Pennsylvania, with McCain beating Clinton by two points, but Obama beating McCain by 10.

And then there is the Pew poll taken

voters are permitted to change their vote at the Democratic National Convention. “Every delegate, with very few exceptions, is free to make up his or her mind however they choose,” she said, introducing the possibility of a new, more brass-knuckled kind of delegate campaign. “We talk a lot about so-called pledged delegates, but every delegate is expected to exercise in-

A half century after the triumphs of the civil rights movement, a major Democratic candidate is trying to secure the presidential nomination by exploiting racial divides.

immediately after the major wave of media surrounding the Wright controversy. The survey showed both Obama and Clinton defeating McCain, but more significantly, Obama actually performing slightly better among white voters than Clinton—a blow to those Clinton backers hoping that superdelegates may begin to fear a white voter backlash against the Illinois senator.

In two bold moves at the end of March, her campaign launched a two-pronged initiative to intimidate Democratic leaders and to strong-arm pledged delegates who are already committed to Obama through primaries and caucuses.

First, the Clinton campaign organized 20 major Democratic Party financiers to release a letter to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, upbraiding her for appearing on ABC News and saying, “If the votes of the superdelegates overturn what happened in the elections, it would be harmful to the Democratic Party.”

According to the nonpartisan Center for Responsive Politics, the contributors who signed the letter have given a combined \$23.6 million to Democrats since 1999. These mega-donors, clearly wielding their financial heft as an implied threat, claimed that Pelosi had taken an “untenable position” by merely suggesting superdelegates should avoid overturning the results of democratic primaries and caucuses.

At the same time, Clinton told *Time* that, technically, even pledged delegates who are supposed to represent the will of

dependent judgment.”

A late March NBC News poll reports that if a candidate “loses among delegates selected by voters but still wins the nomination,” a plurality (41 percent) of Democratic voters believe that candidate would be “not legitimate.” Many of those surveyed probably remember the recent episodes of stolen elections and the past eras of brokered conventions and corrupt—and often racist—political machines stuffing ballot boxes.

The latter, in fact, was precisely how the epithet “Democrat Party”—as opposed to “Democratic Party”—was coined. As the language-obsessed William Safire documented 24 years ago in a *New York Times* column, Republican leaders created the term “Democrat Party” in the mid-20th century to imply that their opponents—many bigoted segregationists and machine pols—were, in fact, undemocratic.

After the Florida and Ohio debacles in the 2000 and 2004 elections, Republican lamentations about democracy are, of course, absurd. Additionally, many machines have long ago decayed ... except for the one inside the Democratic Party itself—the Clinton machine.

If that machine’s firewall strategy continues to exploit the Race Chasm and threaten to trample the will of voters, Clinton will be asking the Democratic Party, one that has come to champion racial tolerance and democracy, to truly become the Democrat Party—one that ignores those ideals in favor of a single Democrat. ■

BY PAUL JAY

Junot Díaz Redefines Macho

Junot Díaz, who immigrated with his family to the United States from the Dominican Republic when he was 6, teaches creative writing at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. His new novel, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, winner of the National Book Critics Circle

Award in fiction, tells the story of Oscar, a freakishly overweight young man fixated on computer games, Marvel comics and science fiction. He's ignored by women but obsessed with sex. His life is chronicled by Yunior, the novel's macho narrator, who tries to help Oscar while having an on-again, off-again affair with Oscar's sister, Lola.

Praised for its narrative inventiveness and virtuosic language, the novel shifts deftly between the lives of these teenagers in contemporary New Jersey and the experience of Oscar and Lola's mother, Belicia—who, 50 years earlier, growing up in the Dominican Republic, was brutalized by a series of men associated with the former Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo.

Díaz draws a compelling link between the violent masculinity of Trujillo and his henchmen and the contemporary forces that shape Oscar, Lola and Yunior. At turns outrageously funny and deeply historical, the novel's serious engagement with Oscar's nerdiness is matched by its interest in the persistence of historical memory and the politics of storytelling.

The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao was on nearly everyone's list of the best novels of the year. What do you think is going on culturally, politically or in the world of contemporary literature that explains its popularity?

I wish that it was some sort of sea

change, but I'm not so sure. This is the same culture that will turn around next year and nominate and celebrate a deeply conservative, deeply troubling text. I'm not so certain that this concept of linear progress is all that accurate. We have multiple, concurrent strands in literature and sometimes some of these strands are more dominant, and sometimes some of them are more recessive. It's kind of a dance.

We have far more sophisticated readers, whether its readers of literature or television. A serial show like "Lost" or "Heroes" wasn't possible when I was growing up. People weren't prepared to follow a story consistently; there wasn't the technology of DVDs to catch up. We've become much more sophisticated on a narrative level.

But again, I'm not so sure that the political follows hand-in-hand with that kind of narrative sophistication. I'm much more cautious about the politics of a country like ours that continually votes in war-mongering morons. It's made me much more cautious.

You're regularly referred to as a Latino or Dominican-American writer. However, you also seem connected to contemporary transnational writers like Zadie Smith, Hari Kunzru, Mohsin Hamid or Kiran Desai, who are interested in hybridized identities developing in response to globalization. Do you think of yourself as an American writer, a Latino writer or do you relate to these transnational writers?

I was a Dominican kid who immigrated to the United States in the '70s and settled in New Jersey. I was trying to write to that experience. I could never have imagined a Zadie Smith growing up—that wasn't the sort of thing I was connecting to. I was sort of imagining, 'Could I possibly contain New Jersey and the Dominican Republic?'

Now, the sort of paucity of my vision doesn't de-legitimize this larger claim that there seem to be a lot of people wrestling with this issue. We've been doing this forever. That's the whole project of the New World. But I do think that now there are more languages, more narrative techniques and, like you said, there's a lot more permission. Writers give each other permission to write things. You read someone when you're a kid who is doing something interesting and you're like, "Damn, I can do that, too."

But in the end I *am* part of a larger movement, and there is a lot of art trying to deal with what you're describing, whether we call it transnationalism or something else.

I'm from a family of illegal immigrants. That's very different from people whose parents were middle class or upper-middle class, South Asian or Caribbean, who came to the "metropole." But it doesn't change the fact that in our own ways and with our own class differences, we're attempting to deal with similar issues.

In your novel, you weave the personal with the political through your treatment of masculinity, drawing a clear line from Trujillo's masculinity to Oscar's and Yunior's. How conscious were you of exploring this through the interrogation of a Dominican or gangster masculinity?

I was obsessed with this idea that all these folks were dealing with this grand narrative of this Trujillo masculinity.



Novelist Junot Díaz
worries about a country
that 'continually votes in
war-mongering morons.'

What was interesting about this book was that it was making some sort of tremendous, bizarre claims about New World masculinity. I'm fascinated by this stuff because I grew up in a United States where this masculinity is the absolute operational model.

Look, everyone sits around and pretends that we're all in this new age of masculinity and this new age of sensitivity and that the kids don't play football anymore, they play video games, they watch the "X Games."

The truth is that if Trujillo was alive and well, he would feel extremely comfortable in the United States. I mean, for God's sake, the war in Iraq [would be] just perfect: He loved a civic society that misunderstood what it was and he loved an exceptionally violent governing elite.

Oscar's interests mark him as a classic nerd, and for this reason he's tremendously anxious about his masculinity, which the macho Yuniór, the narrator, represents. But doesn't Yuniór learn a new model of masculinity through his relationship with Oscar?

And from telling the story. Yuniór is attempting to unlearn and expiate him-

self, repent in some way, do penance. But, unfortunately, he's doing it in exactly the same way that the masculinity he's trying to undermine has always perpetuated itself, by being the only voice speaking.

Yuniór keeps giving clear messages, that in some ways, "Look, guys, I'm trying to lay out a map of how fucked up I am and how fucked up this is." But the very map is a product of that power, and so is the reader's desire for that authoritative narrative. People want to feel like the person telling them the story has facts.

I was particularly moved by the last page, where Oscar talks about the paramount importance of intimacy. He's been in search of sex, but he discovers intimacy. How did you come to that idea?

I guess I knew it from the beginning. It's basically what's true about every quest narrative. What you discover is that the object of the quest is just a MacGuffin, and that what you learn in the journey is actually what was valuable, but you didn't know it. You were so focused on getting the ring, getting the spear, killing this creature, that you don't realize that there was something else.

Isn't there a political dimension to your emphasis on the importance of intimacy? The hyper-sexuality and violent masculinity we see in Trujillo has seeped into Yuniór, and that's politically important because the capacity to experience intimacy is ultimately going to determine the way you exercise political power.

The first rule of intimacy is that you have to drop your performances, that the "masks" have to drop.

This book is filled with characters wearing masks. We're narrative animals, we love to wear masks, that's the way we live. We perform. But yet, it's very difficult to connect without the dropping of masks.

For me, that's the art of stories. Stories are there so you can get to the point where you can finally take off that last mask. That's what growing up is, because when you take your last mask off, you are utterly vulnerable, you are utterly in another person's power.

And what contemporary masculinity, what contemporary power structure, ever puts itself utterly in someone else's power? Isn't storytelling the desire to put everything about the world in your power?

You know, when I write a book, I'm the only one who speaks in it. That's really disturbing, dude. Think about it. It's like a person who is sitting there with little dolls and going, "Hello, Billy, do you want a falafel?" "Yes, I do." There's something really reclusively weird about it.

But I just can't imagine, as a man, you can become a human without encountering other humans, and the only way to encounter a human is by being vulnerable.

Which I would want to connect back to intimacy.

Well, that's it. The access to intimacy is vulnerability.

I think we have a pun here in masculinity spelled with a "k": mask-ularity.

Well, there's no question about it. ■

PAUL JAY is a professor of English at Loyola University Chicago. His essays on literature and culture have appeared in a variety of journals. He is currently finishing a book on globalization and contemporary literature.



BY JEAN FORST

Strikebreaker vs. Muckraker

How can two Americans, sharing the same classically American virtue of hard work, affect their country in such profoundly different ways? Steve Weinberg's *Taking on the Trust: The Epic Battle of Ida Tarbell and John D. Rockefeller*

(Norton, March 2008) explores the remarkable work ethic that drove John D. Rockefeller and Ida Minerva Tarbell. He invented the trust. She invented investigative journalism. Destiny demanded that they meet—and parry.

With narrative flair, Weinberg crafts a dual biography that dramatizes the clash of two formidable personalities: Tarbell, the careful researcher and writer, Rockefeller, the intensely ambitious corporate titan.

So aptly does Weinberg tell a story that we sympathize with a tyrant. Surviving an upbringing rendered precarious by a selfish, conniving father, Rockefeller matured early, Weinberg tells us, meeting life gravely with a seriousness of purpose. Six weeks of knocking on doors led to a tedious bookkeeping job, at which

point the 16-year-old Rockefeller worked tirelessly to care for his siblings and his beloved mother. In his early 20s, Rockefeller held a series of odd jobs, until a chemical engineer who knew him from church turned his attention to oil.

“A hands-on entrepreneur,” Weinberg writes, Rockefeller pushed a barrel maker he had hired to develop a sealant to prevent oil from oozing through container slats, and then replaced those still-faulty storage devices with tank cars drawn by horses.

Desiring that his company be known for clean-burning kerosene that would not cause fatal explosions, Rockefeller invested accordingly. And while other would-be tycoons hastily constructed shoddy devices to extract oil out of the ground as quickly

as possible, Rockefeller reflected and planned. If interested in getting rich, he proved different from those wishing to get rich quick.

With comparable aplomb, Weinberg details Tarbell's growth as a scholar and a writer, first at Allegheny College in Pennsylvania, then in Paris, where she traveled to research French Revolution icon Madame Roland, and finally at *McClure's Magazine*, where she worked alongside journalists like Lincoln Steffens.

Meticulously tracking her professional life, Weinberg tells of the hardships Tarbell endured as a history-oriented investigative reporter for *McClure's*. She inhabited the Library of Congress and other Washington repositories to pore over original documents about Napoleon. She traveled great distances to access court records for her study of Abraham Lincoln. This determination would serve her well in taking on Standard Oil.

Like earlier Rockefeller biographers that Weinberg draws upon (such as *Titan* and *John D: The Founding Father of the Rockefellers*), he pairs examples of Rockefeller's misdeeds with examples of his munificence: Though Rockefeller bought people out, he made them rich in the process; despite his need for control, he sought out talent and rewarded it. Rockefeller amassed enormous wealth, but he gave huge chunks of it to charity, an instinct he developed when he was poor.

Weinberg compares Rockefeller's approach to charity with Andrew Carnegie's. Carnegie widely publicized his generosity—hence Carnegie Mellon, the Carnegie Foundation and Carnegie Hall. In contrast to Rockefeller, Weinberg notes, Carnegie is today remembered largely for his philanthropy. True, Rockefeller established the Rockefeller Foundation, but he also anonymously created a medical institute that helped stamp out yellow fever, as well as quietly founding the University of Chicago (which, granted, includes Rockefeller Chapel).

Still, Weinberg neglects to mention that while Rockefeller donated portions of his fortune to charity, he held on to most of it, while Carnegie shed 90 per-

cent of his wealth.

Rockefeller desired total control of the oil industry. In 1870, Standard Oil processed just 2 percent to 3 percent of America's crude oil. By 1880, it controlled 90 percent of the refining business.

As an antitrust wave swept the nation,

Rockefeller tapped xenophobic impulses to drum up business, implying that European investors backed his competitor, the Tidewater Pipe Line Company.

the staff at *McClure's* considered taking on the sugar and beef trusts, then U.S. Steel, before deciding to target Rockefeller's behemoth.

Tarbell's father despaired at Rockefeller taking over his Petroleum Producer's Union, and that guaranteed that Tarbell would take on the titan. But an exposé remained an idea in the back of her mind until she encountered Henry Demarest Lloyd's *Wealth Against Commonwealth*, which launched a "systemic indictment" of the trusts. Lloyd had neglected to name names. Tarbell named Rockefeller. Then, making use of documents, such as transcripts from the hearings of congressional committees and state legislatures, she proceeded to specify his abuses and parse his psyche.

Weinberg outlines the destructive power of Standard Oil. He describes the infamous "Cleveland Massacre," in which Rockefeller pounced on distressed competitors to "integrate" 22 of Cleveland's 26 oil refineries into Standard Oil.

In another incident, Rockefeller tapped xenophobic impulses to drum up business, implying that European investors backed his competitor, the Tidewater Pipe Line Company. Fixing railroad rates and slandering his competitors, Rockefeller deflated the entrepreneurial spirit of others. Control tipped into self-serving corruption, and the greed that followed consumed him.

Tarbell never begrudged Rockefeller his wealth. Rather, Weinberg explains, in

The History of the Standard Oil Company, she revealed through careful study that he hadn't played fair in gaining it. "To her credit," Weinberg writes, "rarely did Tarbell portray Rockefeller as personally evil." In fact, surmising that he suffered for his success, Tarbell noted—while dis-

creetly observing Rockefeller in church one day—that "[n]othing but paying [for his sins] ever ploughs such lines in a man's face, ever sets his lips to such a melancholy angle."

In an era that could easily give way to sensationalist reporting, Tarbell ploddingly got it right. Tarbell was a woman in a man's world, a fact Weinberg seldom highlights. But then, Tarbell experienced little discrimination as a woman, and so presumably transcended her gender. Yet, raised by a forthright suffragist mother, Tarbell famously and disappointingly declared that the only reason she was glad she was a woman was because she did not have to marry one.

"How difficult she is to categorize," Weinberg concludes, after devoting only a couple of pages to this controversy in the book's final chapter. Her paradoxical ideas inspire lively discussion among Tarbell scholars. Engaging these debates more fully would have strengthened Weinberg's study.

The clash between Tarbell and Rockefeller was a singular one for a singular era. Yet Weinberg's fleeting references to Microsoft and Wal-Mart suggest that today's trusts are no less extraordinary, as corporate heads ruthlessly attempt to leapfrog legislation to gain a lion's share of the market.

Weinberg's study of Tarbell's achievements in confronting corporate abuse will inspire future journalists, and make her more the rule than the exception. ■

MUSIC

Rap the Casbah

By Michelle Chen

FOR MORE THAN a generation, hip-hop has drawn kids from neighborhoods around the world into the musical intersection of street culture and political consciousness. Now that common ground is making a mark in one of the globe's most conflict-ridden areas: the Arab world.

Tracing the breadth of the diaspora—from French streetscapes to Gaza slums—Arab youth are seizing hip-hop culture as a platform for self-expression. Dam, a three-member crew based in Lyd, a town outside Jerusalem, documents the bleak realities of segregation, violence and poverty under Israeli rule. (Their name means “blood” in Hebrew and “eternity” in Arabic.)

The group's breakthrough protest anthem, “*Min Irhabi?*” (“Who's a Terrorist?”), released in 2001, reverses a common ideological refrain: “You're killing us like you've killed our ancestors/ You want me to go to the law? What for? You're the Witness, the Lawyer and the Judge!”

In “*Inkilab*” (“Revolution”), Dam emcee Suhell Nafar warns “all the people of love and peace”: “How can we have co-existence when we don't even exist? It takes revolution to find a solution.”

As political marginalization stokes hopelessness among Palestinian youth, Nafar says hip-hop's mission is “to deliver the positive message, and to let the people know that they're not terrorists, to let them know that they're human beings.”

Nafar also notes that music can cross checkpoints and borders more easily than Palestinians can. “We can't get into Gaza, or go to Nablus, or go to Syria,” he says. “But our music got there a long time ago. There's no other way to connect.”

On the other side of the barrier, the Gaza-based Palestinian Rapperz (PR) buck at the Israeli occupation with dark, lumbering beats and voices steeped in bitterness. The crew's trademark symbols invoke graffiti and barbed wire.

“Rap is known for people who struggle, and we are here struggling, so rap is our weapon to defend ourselves,” says emcee



Members of hip-hop group Ramallah Underground, from left: Aswatt, Boikutt, Stormtrap.

Ayman Meghames. With the military paralyzing nearly every facet of life in Gaza, he says, “it's the only way to express our feelings without getting killed.”

The new documentary *Slingshot Hip Hop*, by Palestinian-American artist Jackie Salloum, follows the daily travails of Dam, PR and other Palestinian artists. Scenes of studio jams and packed clubs are interspersed with police harassment, a cell-phone conversation with friends in prison and vast landscapes of rubble where neighborhoods once stood.

That atmosphere drove young musicians in the West Bank to channel their frustrations into a hip-hop collective called Ramallah Underground. Named after the region's cultural hub, the trio's politically charged rhythms blend trip-hop, electronica and Arab folk sounds.

“We consider our music to be very political, simply because our lives are very political,” says co-founder Stormtrap. “Just the mere fact that we know what's happening puts a huge weight and responsibility on us to do something about it.”

Hip-hop artists in other parts of the Arab world, while perhaps less explicitly politicized, nonetheless reflect on social tensions that engulf their communities.

Casablanca-based emcee Don Bigg, also known as *Al Khaser* (or Rude Boy), says class conflict fuels hip-hop in Morocco, which suffers from some of the deepest wealth inequities in the region. Whereas American hip-hop grew out of a racially divided society, he says, in Morocco, “We

have the same segregation, but not against Afro-American people, but from the rich [who are] against what we call *wlad sha'ab*, or the common people.

In Egypt, where rapid economic change has bred alienation among many youth, the Cairo-based Arab Rap Family tries to intone a message of affirmation through its music. Nadoo, an emcee with roots in both Egypt and the United States, says, “We want them to grow with knowledge about life and history, and the courage to speak their mind and not be negative.”

As they challenge the political and cultural status quo, Arab hip-hop artists are also looking to upset barriers within their own communities. Abeer Alzinaty's sharp, streetwise voice has complemented Dam and other Palestinian artists on many recordings. But most fans have only heard, not seen, the pioneering Palestinian R&B vocalist, because her family and community have pressured her not to sing publicly. Hamstrung by negative attention, she has limited her performances to venues outside her community in Lyd.

Even within the scene, Alzinaty says some male artists choose to stay quiet on issues of women's equal right to self-expression—a glaring contrast to their pro-Palestinian activism. “When you get revolution personally in your life,” she says, “people tend to take a step backwards.”

Alzinaty, who plans to relocate to the United States to develop her music, sees hip-hop as a channel for women's empowerment outside of traditional cul-

tural constraints. “We have a lot of issues to talk about,” she says. “And traditional music can do that, but not as fiercely as hip-hop can, and you can’t really get too angry on a classic song.”

Receiving scant attention from the commercial music industry in their home countries, Arab hip-hop artists remain an underground phenomenon. But through viral Internet marketing, Ramallah Underground, Dam and others have attracted international followings and collaborated with artists in the United States and Europe.

Some Arab hip-hop musicians see their budding community as part of a global revival. Nafar says that while mainstream corporate hip-hop goads people to “shake their asses and to forget about all the stuff that’s really happening,” hip-hop’s original iconoclasm lives on wherever social strife roils.

“This is what we need,” he says. “We’ve been hungry for people who speak freely.” ■

BOOKS

As Unions Fall, Lawsuits Rise

By Lawrence Joseph

THOMAS GEOGHEGAN ADMITS he’s biased.

The labor lawyer writes in the opening pages of his fourth book, *See You in Court: How the Right Made America a Lawsuit Nation* (New Press, 2007), that his background colors his observations about labor and the labor movement.

A 1975 graduate of Harvard Law School, Geoghegan has practiced labor law, mostly in Chicago, for more than 30 years, representing unions and employee groups in civil rights, labor and pension cases. He has helped bring lawsuits on behalf of workers defrauded of pensions and of union rank-and-file groups seeking union democracy, as well as filed public interest suits to enforce child labor

laws and to stop the spread of tuberculosis among the homeless.

Geoghegan’s style captures the colloquial sharpness once found in the writings of the expert pamphleteer, using facts—what he sees on his street—as his vantage point for political, moral and legal insights. He writes out of the tradition of Chicago activists, such as Jane Addams, Saul Alinsky, Clarence Darrow, Studs Terkel and Richard Wright.

Geoghegan is the most important writer of our time in one of the left’s most important—if not *the* most important—social traditions.

Geoghegan centers *See You in Court* around the fundamental and unfair fact that the bottom 40 percent of American families receives less than 14 percent of all national income (a percentage that continues to worsen). It has become harder, Geoghegan says, to use a term like “us” to describe us as a country. “In no other developed country, at no other time in history,” Geoghegan writes, “has there ever

[art space]



WHAT’S THE HAPPENING?

American avant-garde artist Allan Kaprow (1927–2006) created what are known as Happenings—works designed to focus the attention on everyday events.

One Happening, “Household” (1964), is an improvisational play that addresses gender stereotypes, world peace and the environment. In it, Kaprow, encourages the actors to interpret the screenplay and forces the audience to rethink its own connections between ideas and events. One scene involves female actors licking jam off a car.

The Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles is showcasing Kaprow’s works through June 30 as part of its “Art is Life” series. Learn more at www.moca.org.

—Dan Dineen

been such a steady increase in inequality as there has been in the United States.”

The sense of futility experienced by those at the median income and below has become so destabilizing that it has eroded belief in the rule of law: “If we do not expect the world to be reasonable and fair,” writes Geoghegan, “then sooner or later we do not demand or expect those qualities from law, either.”

The result is that fewer people participate in social or political citizenship. The legal system is something they feel they haven’t consented to, something alien.


Labor lawyer that he is, Geoghegan returns us to the Wagner Act of 1935—the original federal legislation that provides employees with the right to join unions and to bargain collectively. The economic rationale for the Wagner Act was that men and women who work for wages are, as individuals, in an inherently unequal bargaining position to negotiate for wages, hours and conditions of employment.

The act’s social-political objective was to allow wage earners to hold their own—economically and as citizens—against those with wealth and political power who employed them.

Collective bargaining contracts began containing provisions that a worker could not be fired except for “just cause.” Neutral arbitrators could resolve grievances under collective bargaining agreements—kind of a private, contractual due process of law. Remedies included reinstatement and back pay, as well as the understanding that, under a contract, a relationship between the employer and the union would continue.

Labor theorists have analogized unionized workplace relations to miniature social democracies. Although collectively bargained rights were contractual, they were rights, according to Geoghegan, that felt as if they were constitutional.

When he graduated from law school, Geoghegan did not realize that organized labor had already begun to collapse. In 1958, unions covered 34 percent of private sector employees (maybe more, some labor historians argue). In the North and Midwest (where the core of the economy was at the time) the percentage was as high as 60 percent. Now, unions cover only 7



Wave after wave of deregulation has resulted in a substantial increase in individual and class action lawsuits.

percent to 8 percent of the private sector.

What happened? Geoghegan explains that although employees had a right to organize under the Wagner Act, the act contained no sanctions against employers who fired labor organizers. In 1947, when the Republican-driven Taft-Hartley Act curbed labor’s power to hit back through wildcat strikes, secondary boycotts of neutral employers and mass picketing, the act’s weakness began to matter.

During the ’50s and ’60s, when employers moved into the non-unionized South and West, unions found it was hard to rely on the Wagner Act to organize. Even when many employers openly—and illegally—threatened or fired pro-union workers, employers weren’t fined. While an employer could go to court when unions tried to strike, the workers themselves had no right to go to court.

By the early ’80s, Geoghegan notes, employers were firing at least one in 20 workers in the course of every contested organizing campaign. Worse, the Republican Party’s planned political destruction of social expectations embodied in New Deal-type laws exacerbated the paralyzing effect of these illegal threats and firings.

The labor-centric social democracy that Geoghegan once envisioned has turned into a government autocracy that, for almost 30 years, has privatized the common wealth in favor of corporatist interests.

The 92 percent to 93 percent of private

sector employees who work without a union contract, labor under a rule of law known as “employment at will,” which means that a worker can be fired for any reason at any time, with no warning. Not surprisingly, after unions began to collapse, workers started flooding the courts with civil rights-related claims, analogous to claims in tort.

In *See You in Court*, Geoghegan writes that when a non-union worker comes to him and says that he or she has been fired, he runs through a not-so-short list of possible legal action to pursue: the 1878 Civil Rights Act, the 1964 Civil Rights Act (as amended in 1991), the 1967 Age Discrimination in Employment Act, the 1974 Employee Retirement and Income Security Act, the 1988 Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification Act, the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act and the 1993 Family and Medical Leave Act. Unlike the Wagner Act, these provide protection for individuals as members of a particular group or on the basis of a specified protected trait—not as workers.

At the same time, hospitals and doctors are suing patients far more than their patients sue them. Some law firms exist solely to chase after patients—not only to collect bills, but also to garnish wages, legally attach bank accounts and, if need be, to press a patient into bankruptcy.

Wave after political wave of deregulation resulted in a substantial increase

in individual and class action lawsuits. Geoghegan tells us of a friend, a judge in collection court, who every day sits on the bench and goes through a morning's call of 1,000 to 1,500 cases. Credit card companies, hospitals and banks sell their collection cases in bulk to assignees, who then come into his court to track down people, put a levy on their bank accounts and garnish their wages. Litigation costs have skyrocketed because of the creative ways that defense lawyers spend money on themselves.

Geoghegan does not see a solution to the problem in the courts. He writes that two legal cultures are presently represented on the U.S. Supreme Court—"moderate right (Justice David Souter) versus extreme right (Justice Antonin Scalia)."

The political, ideological center of the "New Right" is the Federalist Society, founded in 1982, whose members have dictated appointments to the federal bench during five Republican administrations. The New Right believes that a government that socializes wealth for wage-earning people is illegitimate. Members or supporters of the Federalist Society openly twit lawyers like Geoghegan: "If we bring up the Declaration of Independence, they say: 'Oh, these truths are self-evident? Well, they aren't evident to us.' Bring up the Geneva Convention, and they say: 'Are we going to let these little countries tell us what to do?'"

Throughout *See You in Court*, Geoghegan proposes various strategies to remedy this labyrinth of social destruction:

- Eliminate legal barriers that prevent union organizing.
- Provide workers with appropriate legal remedial means of enforcing the right to join a union, to collectively bargain and to strike.
- For those not covered by collective bargaining agreements, eliminate employment-at-will and replace it with a legislatively imposed just-cause requirement for employment termination.
- And—a major theme in this indispensable book—increase democracy in every possible way through the legislative branches of our government. That includes allowing for lawsuits

on gerrymandering; changing the filibuster in the U.S. Senate; reforming the Electoral College; and eliminating restraints on voter registration.

In other words, do what's necessary to rebuild a public sense of democratic process—what used to be called "civics." ■

BOOKS

Collapse of the Fourth Estate

By Jon Whiten

IN MARCH, ON the five-year anniversary of the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, the nation's major news outlets reflected on the war and what led us to the half-decade mark. But few evaluated their own roles in the disaster that has maimed countless Iraqis and U.S. troops, killed hundreds of thousands and, according to economists Linda Blimes and Joseph Stiglitz, could ultimately cost up to \$3 trillion.

Fortunately, two new books do exam-

ine the media's role. Greg Mitchell's *So Wrong for So Long: How the Press, the Pundits—and the President—Failed on Iraq* (Union Square, March 2008) lays out a timeline of the media's damning missteps, while *When the Press Fails: Political Power and the News Media from Iraq to Katrina* (University of Chicago, May 2007), co-authored by W. Lance Bennett, Regina G. Lawrence and Steven Livingston, shows how these missteps are not aberrations, but byproducts of the American press.

In *So Wrong*, Mitchell, the editor at *Editor & Publisher*, collects and updates 79 of his columns from January 2003 to November 2007. The result: a history of the war as told through the mainstream media prism. Readers are painfully reminded of all the "turning points" cited by war proponents and their counterparts in the press—from "Mission Accomplished" to Gen. David Petraeus' troop surge.

Mitchell offers gut-wrenching stories about the war that many Americans likely didn't read about, much less see on television, such as the story of 27-

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



year-old Army Spc. Alyssa Peterson, who shot herself with her service rifle after objecting to Army interrogation techniques in a prison in Tal Afar, in northwestern Iraq.

His columns on soldier suicides and on “solatia”—the U.S. military’s practice of financially compensating Iraqis for physical damage or a loss of life—are haunting, leaving us to wonder why the general public didn’t see more work of this caliber.

But while *So Wrong* describes the who, what and where of the media’s Iraq meltdown, it doesn’t offer much insight into the why. Aside from Mitchell’s powerful introduction, which argues the press didn’t approach the Bush administration’s claims with enough skepticism, he doesn’t elaborate on the structural reasons the media fell down on the job.

That’s where *When the Press Fails* is useful. The book, though written in an academic tone, offers a blistering critique of the “operating practices of American journalism,” which the authors say “have grown entwined with power and officials.”

The authors, all professors of political science or public affairs, argue that America’s “semi-independent” press is largely reactive, working within the “sphere of official consensus.” Journalists cover what the administration does and says, and how critics inside-the-beltway respond. In other words, political controversy, rather than public deliberation, is the name of the game.

When elite opinion shapers engage in vigorous and substantive debate, the authors say the press does a good job at reflecting that and nurturing a deliberative public. But when the public needs it most—say, when critical debate within government is most limited, like in the run-up to the Iraq War—the press often fails.

Both books explore the rise in critical coverage as the war dragged on, noting that by summer 2006, there was more solid reporting on the horrors of the Iraq War, including blockbuster stories like the *Washington Post*’s exposé of CIA black sites and the *New York Times*’ reporting on domestic spying.

But despite the more aggressive stance, the lack of coverage of two recent events

excerpt



DAWN OF THE CATHODE RAY TUBE

From A Word from our Viewers: Reflection from Early Television Audiences (Praeger, 2008), by Ray Barfield, an English professor at Clemson University. The following recollection is from Jack French, whom Barfield calls a “prominent figure in ‘golden age radio.’”

In the late ‘40s, only a handful of professional people bought television sets in Rhinelander, Wis., a little town not that far from the Michigan border and umpteen hundred miles from the nearest TV studio in Milwaukee. The set was basically just a piece of furniture, since there was virtually no reception. But if you were a doctor or a dentist, you were expected to have one in your living room. None of my circle of friends had a TV set then, so all I knew about this new entertainment medium was what I read in magazines.

My high school debate team made a trip to the University of St. Paul for an invitational tournament in 1951, and it was to be the first time I saw television. Shortly after our arrival, one of our team came rushing back to us, eyes wide, and proclaimed, “There’s a television set in the student lounge, and we can watch it!” The rest of us followed our intrepid co-member to a large, dark but friendly basement room, filled with at least 200 college students ...

At the very front of this enormous room was a television set, its tiny, round, bright screen filled with “snow” concealing all semblance of figures in an undecipherable program. Other than the snow flutter, nothing could be seen. (And believe me, coming from northern Wisconsin, I know “snow” when I see it.) The sound emanating from the TV set was too garbled and scratchy to provide a clue as to what ... we were supposed to be watching. My debate team and I watched in the dark for about 15 minutes, saw nothing but snow, and could not figure out what was holding the rapt attention of all these students.

I finally announced, “This is stupid. We can’t see anything. This will never replace radio.” The team agreed, and we left in disgust, most of us under the assumption we would never watch TV again.



proves the press is still failing on Iraq, even if it has improved overall. In March, both the Pentagon memo refuting an al Qaeda/Saddam Hussein link (again) and the Winter Soldier veterans’ hearings in Washington, D.C., got virtually no play in the mainstream press, with few exceptions.

So, is American journalism simply doomed?

Not quite.

Both books thankfully offer a way forward. Mitchell suggests that journalists be held accountable. He notes that “few of those who promoted the war ... have lost any standing in the media.” He also advises the press to be rigorously

skeptical of and fully critique dubious official claims.

Bennett, Lawrence and Livingston argue that a “new news standard” based on four key principles—from serving the public interest to using techniques other than political conflict to explore government policy—could foster a more democratic press. They admit that a rethinking of the journalistic profession would be “fraught with difficulty,” but note that the current faulty standards didn’t magically appear, but were the product of media self-examination.

As the media’s poor performance on the Iraq War makes clear, another such self-exam is due, stat. ■

BY TERRY J. ALLEN

As Hunger Rises, Chew on This



A DIET OF BREAD and water used to be emblematic of poverty. Now a global food crisis is transforming that meager meal into a luxury for much of the world.

The prices of the world's three main grains—corn, rice and wheat—more than doubled last year. The causes include poor harvests linked to climate change, diversion of cropland to biofuels, population increases, rising meat consumption, emerging diseases and soaring fuel prices.

In a globalized economy, issues of food scarcity and inflation should be a matter not only of humanitarian concern, but also of national security. A food crisis is exploding.

Last year, spiraling food prices sparked protests and riots in Cameroon, Egypt, Guinea, India, Mauritania, Mexico, Morocco, Pakistan, Senegal, Uzbekistan and Yemen.

Children in Yemen marched to draw attention to their hunger. Farmers in Thailand slept in fields to prevent rice crop theft. Hundreds of construction workers in the United Arab Emirates torched cars and ransacked buildings to demand higher wages to counter surging inflation.

The problem is not just price but actual shortage. World grain stores have not been this low since the end of World War II. Argentina and Vietnam have risked treaty violations to impose protectionist trade caps and taxes aimed at stabilizing supply and stanching inflation. The Philippine government asked fast food restaurants to serve less rice to ease shortages.

The poorest are the worst hit, especially as the lifeline U.N. World Food Program (WFP) frays. In late March, it warned that unless donor countries immediately kick in \$500 million to offset price hikes, WFP will start rationing food aid that feeds 73 million people—from Darfur's genocide refugees to Haiti's children.

Wealthy countries also feel the pangs. Despite dim-wittedly sunny U.S. government statistics on inflation, consumers—who are already staggered by fuel prices—have seen the cost of food staples soar.

In my own agriculture-heavy Vermont, Chris Barkyoub, head of Hillcrest Foods, reports “an extreme shortage of wheat. And there's hardly a food item that's not going up. A lot of people are scared out there.”

The most intractable factors are the evil twins of climate change and fossil fuel dependence. Global wheat production has fallen behind demand for seven of the past eight years, as historic droughts have hit major wheat-producing countries like Australia, Canada, Russia and Uzbekistan.

Part of the price rise in Hillcrest's wheat is due to a 30 percent fuel surcharge it passes to customers. And because most of the world's fertilizers are petroleum-based, farmers are damned by low yield if they scrimp, and by high costs if they don't. From January 2007 to January 2008, global fertilizer prices surged by an unprecedented 200 percent, as farmers tried to maximize production of corn—now used for ethanol. Hardest hit are African farmers, many of whom need fertilizer to replenish nutrient-depleted soils.

Adding to the shortages and price spikes is an insane policy that pits the world's 850 million chronically hun-

gry against its 800 million motorists. Despite the nearly even numbers, it is not a fair fight. In an October 2007 address, Jean Ziegler, the U.N. special rapporteur on the right to food, called the biofuel boom “a crime against humanity.”

Another vast diversion of world grain is animal products. One pound of meat requires up to 40 pounds of grain input. Not only does the earth have more mouths to feed every second, but more of them are chewing meat as rising living standards in China and India make it affordable. China's per capita meat consumption jumped from 44 pounds in 1980 to 110 pounds today—still half the U.S. average. According to the Sierra Club, “America could feed most of Africa with the grains we feed to livestock.”

Adding to global fear is a virulent wheat disease that began in Uganda in 1999. It recently reached Iran and is threatening crops in India and Pakistan. The fungus, known as Ug-99, “can spread rapidly and has the potential to cause global crop epidemics,” U.N. expert Dr. Jacques Diouf said this March. In the '50s, a similar plague killed 40 percent of North America's spring wheat.

According to the *New Scientist* magazine, “U.S. Department of Homeland Security met in March 2007 to discuss the possibility that someone could transport Ug-99 deliberately.”

While the Bush administration scares the nation with visions of bin Laden lurking under our beds, greed and willful blindness are precipitating a global catastrophe of hunger that endangers not only America's security, but the world's. ■

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Vonnegut

Continued from back page

to “catch people before they become generals and presidents and so forth, and poison their minds with humanity,” would no doubt be proud. Bemused but proud.

I recently attended an evening meeting of the fan club, known to members as the KC, or Kurt Club. Eight women and one man met in a chilly dorm room on the Gui Da campus. They whispered to each other while thumbing through bootleg copies (acquired via a tiny campus blackmarket of English books) of the British edition of the Vonnegut classic *Breakfast of Champions*, waiting for the meeting to begin.

Shortly after six, a young woman with a round face and a heavy Cantonese accent stood and introduced herself as Rose. She recited the club’s unofficial motto, culled from the pages of Vonnegut’s 1961 novel, *Mother Night*: “We are what we pretend to be,” she said in a quavering voice, “so we must be careful what we pretend to be.”

No warning could be more apt for today’s China—a totalitarian, free market, crony capitalist wonderland pretending to be socialist and democratic.

Isabel stood, opening her book to a dog-eared page. She pointed to a few of the simple, felt-penned drawings Vonnegut included in the book, each more ridiculous than the last: an American flag, an anus, underpants, the date “1492,” a vagina. Isabel blushed as she pointed to the last one, but quickly got to her point. “Our authors are always so serious,” she began, “but Vonnegut is outrageous. What is his purpose here, and do you support his strategy?”

KC members had posed these questions at last month’s meeting, and each member had prepared a written answer, which they took turns reading, occasionally correcting each other’s pronunciation of uncommon English words (“paradigm,” “subversion,” “granfalloon”).

The most insightful essay came from the only male in the club, a 23-year-old with thick, wire-framed glasses. He went by the name Little Dragon (in honor of martial arts actor Bruce Lee), and read in slow, halting English: “Intellectuals in America and intellectuals in China serve different roles. In China, the role is to serve the

state. In America, the role is to serve the truth.” Little Dragon paused, looked nervously at me while pushing his glasses up his nose, and continued. “But it is said that individual Americans feel lost. They have material excess but no equality, and democracy but no power. So Vonnegut sees there is no truth worth serving, and sim-

‘We don’t understand all of what Vonnegut wrote, but we think reading him helps us understand America. Vonnegut is our window into the American mind.’

ply behaves ridiculous.”

Rose hopped out of her chair. She had rolled her copy of *Breakfast of Champions* into a tube, squeezing it tightly. “This is all true, and this is the danger for our China,” she said. “If we follow the American path [toward] so-called democracy and capitalism, we will lose any sense of truth. Money is not truth, and Vonnegut recognizes this is the only value in America.”

Rose proposed that China reclaim its lost Confucian values, and “return to the values of family and stability, rather than money and greed.”

An hour later, as the meeting came to a close, one final question caught my attention: “Is it true that Confucius is better than capitalism?” These words came from the youngest woman in attendance, a 21-year-old recent graduate of Gui Da. Her English name, I later learned, was Pea Pod.

“I can’t even understand Confucius,” she continued with a twinkle in her eyes, “but I understand being rich. Either way, we Chinese must learn to be like Vonnegut. He is irreverent, and this is the best way to get people to listen.”

Pea Pod then told the others about her frustration with Great Firewall of China, the government’s massive attempt at Internet surveillance and censorship. As many as 40,000 full-time censors work at any one time in Beijing, lurking in chat rooms and searching for signs of political unrest. None of the other members knew what Pea Pod was talking about—much like the vast majority of Chinese, unaware of government efforts to control information. She continued: “Jokes will let people discuss

this topic without feeling it is too threatening. We must learn to view our government and our problems with a sense of humor.”

As KC members filed out of the room, I caught up with Isabel. She was happy about the evening’s discussion. The KC, she explained, has come a long way. It was founded two years ago, shortly after Isa-

bel and her classmates were introduced to *Slaughterhouse-Five* (the introduction occurred in a class I taught at Gui Da while serving as a Peace Corps volunteer).

“Young people in China are searching for new ways to think,” she told me as we walked toward the main gate of the campus. “But we are always careful. I think I love Kurt Vonnegut because he lets me laugh while also thinking in ways that are not popular in China.”

Isabel continued: “No one laughed at Chairman Mao, and no one laughs at [current leader] Hu Jintao. But Americans laugh at George Bush every day. I think this is the source of your power, and I wish China could learn to do the same.”

Roses are red

We reached the university gate just as my bus rumbled toward us in a cloud of dust. Isabel fumbled for her copy of *Breakfast of Champions*. “Vonnegut is my guide,” she said, “but there is still a lot I don’t understand. Can you explain these sentences to me before you go?”

She opened to a page I could barely see. As the bus door opened, I made out the sentences, circled and notated with a question mark: “Roses are red and ready for plucking. You’re 16 and ready for high school.”

I hopped on the bus and leaned out the window. “Sorry, Isabel,” I said as we pulled away. “You’ll just have to discuss that at the next meeting of the KC.” ■

MIKE LEVY is a freelance writer in Northampton, Mass. He is writing a memoir of his experience in China, tentatively titled *The Other Billion*.



BY MIKE LEVY

GUIZHOU UNIVERSITY SITS ON the outskirts of Guiyang City, the sleepy capital of China's poorest province. Undergraduate tuition is the equivalent of \$250 per term, books and housing included. A meal of pulled noodles, hot pot or sweet and sour pork runs about \$1, while the soup-and-rice special in the dining hall costs a dime. The two most popular courses at the school are Mao Tse Tung Economic Thought and an early morning Kung Fu class that meets on the soccer field.

Life at Gui Da, as the school is locally known, is economically, socially, culturally and politically removed from life in America. Despite this, the school is home to an informal—and unlikely—group: a Kurt Vonnegut Fan Club.

"We don't understand all of what Vonnegut wrote," the

club's president, Isabel Yuan, told me, "But we think reading him helps us understand America." Isabel and I spoke over a steaming pot of bitter *pu'er* tea in a restaurant not far from the Gui Da campus. She sat upright, her black eyes focused on the porcelain cup in her hand. "Vonnegut," she continued, "is our window into the American mind."

Great firewall of China

If it is surprising to find Vonnegut fans in China's vast and impoverished west, then it is stunning to learn that they are hoping to view America through Vonnegut's eyes.

The biggest shock, however, is also the most inspiring: Vonnegut's writing has helped members of his fan club criticize their own history and political system, something still largely unthinkable outside the confines of the club's monthly meetings.

Vonnegut, who once wrote that the purpose of his writing was

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